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OR,

THE WILD TEXAN'S MISSION.

BY W. J. HAMILTON,

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ZEBRA ZACK.

CHAPTER I.

ZEBRA ZACK.

A TEXAN prairie in spring time; the year 1846, before Palo Alto. The time night, the moon riding high in the heavens, and shedding a mellow luster upon the broad plain, dotted here and there by clumps of timber, along the beds of the streams.

What steed comes thundering over the plain, coming from the east? The hoof-beats are quick and sharp, and it is evident that the rider is coming at racing speed. A little "island," or clump of trees, for the moment hides the rider from view, and then he comes out into the moonlight, and reins in his steed.

A strange steed, and a stranger rider, stood outlined against the sky.

It was a mustang of wonderful power, with broad chest, short neck, and sloping withers, marked in a peculiar manner. Piebald mustangs are not rare, but this one was striped like a Zebra, in alternate bands of black and white. One of those freaks of nature so seldom seen, and the more valued on that account. He had been hard pressed, for the martingale and breast were flecked with foam, which, even as he stood at rest, dropped from his red muzzle.

But, if the horse was peculiar, the man was even more so.

Sitting lightly in the saddle, his left hand, resting on the pommel, holding the rein loosely, and his right resting on his hip, he was the picture of a centaur of the old days. His face was ashy pale, and the pallor was made more intense by the heavy black beard, which dropped so low, that, as he sat in the saddle, the point of the beard almost touched the hand on the pommel. His hair, suffered to grow

long, dropped upon his shoulders. He wore the buck-skin dress of the ranger, and over his herculean shoulders a scarlet *serape* was thrown, which contrasted strangely with the midnight blackness of his hair. A black belt about his waist sustained two heavy revolvers, then just coming into use. The rifle, slung at his back, was one of the kind familiarly known as the "pea" rifle, from the size of the bullet which it carried, which was indeed little larger than a pea. He wore heavy horseman's boots, the heels armed with the terrible Mexican spurs, with long sharp rowels. But he wore them from habit, for the flanks of his mustang were not furrowed as are those of the horses of the Mexicans, the most cruel riders in the world. He wore no hat, but a scarlet handkerchief, knotted at the two upper corners, and tied loosely under his chin, completed his attire. He sat like a statue, his hand clutching the haft of his knife, while his piercing black eyes searched the prairie to the West.

"A year gone," he muttered, "and nothing done yet. No wonder they haunt me; no wonder I see them riding behind, a ghostly crew, urging me on. Six men live yet, whose bloody deeds call for vengeance, and I am as a little child, unable to do any thing for vengeance sake. Patience, Crockett, patience; give me time, spirits of my slaughtered friends, and you shall see the blood flow, which would delight you. Ha! I hear horses!"

He reined back his mustang into the shelter of the island, and waited. As yet, the hoof-beats were scarcely perceptible, but they grew louder and louder. Soon, two shadowy horsemen were seen, coming up at a swinging trot, and as they came nearer, the moonbeam showed that they were Mexicans, dressed in the gaudy attire so much affected by this peculiar people. A low, savage growl came from the lips of the man in the shadow, and he bent forward in the saddle, trying to see their faces. Just in front of the island they halted, and one of them spoke:

"Wait, Carlos. Let us light our cigarettos, for I must smoke."

A match flashed, and the two faces came together. In the brief moment that the match burned, the man in ambush

saw their faces plainly, and a ferocious hiss, like that of a serpent, came from his livid lips, as he touched his horse with the spur, and bounded out of the cover. The Mexicans recoiled, and each laid a hand upon his sword.

"Wait," said the intruder, hoarsely. "Do you know me, you two?"

"Zebra Zack!" replied the Mexican, who had been called Carlos. "What do you want with us?"

"You were at the Alamo, Carlos Mendoza?" replied Zebra Zack.

"Si, senor; was I not a lieutenant in the army of the great Santa Anna?"

"And you, Raphael Gozo."

"And I, also; what of that?"

"Only this, men," was the stern reply. "You two must die, or Zebra Zack goes under. Don't dare to wag a finger until I give you leave."

"Why should we fight, senor?" asked Gozo, who did not like the appearance of the long-bearded ranger. "We are at peace with the Texans, are we not?"

"The Texans may make peace if they will, but while one of six men remain above the earth, Zebra Zack will make war. Do I not know you, Gozo; and you, Mendoza? You, who dared not face the lion living, and yet dared insult him as he lay dead! You shrunk before the strong arm of Crockett, while he had strength to lift it; you trampled on his face, while he lay dead. Enough talk; you must fight me, here and now."

"Have your will, madman," hissed Gozo. "How will you fight?"

"I know that one Texan is more than a match for any two Greasers who ever trod the earth," replied Zack, proudly. "You have swords, and I have a bowie. We will dismount, and picket the horses upon the plain, leaving every other weapon on them, with the exception of the swords and bowie. Then I will fight you both."

"Demonios!" cried Mendoza. "I do not fear to fight you alone."

"It would be child's play," answered Zack, calmly. "Picket your horses, and draw your swords, and if I do not give you

work enough, then you may treat me as you did Bowie, Crockett, and their gallant men, as well as other martyrs."

The Mexicans, with bitter execrations, leaped lightly from their saddles, and drove the picket-pins into the earth, leaving their short muskets and pistols on their saddles. They knew that the Texan had offered them great odds, when he matched his bowie against their long swords, and they did not doubt their ability to bring him down. He looked on with a calm smile, as they prepared for action, each man throwing off his serape, and appearing in a close-fitting hussar jacket. Both were muscular, dark-browed men, and it may be truly said that few people can *look* more fierce than the Spanish-Indian race of Mexico. But, Zebra Zack was used to Mexicans; and, when they were prepared, he swung himself out of the saddle, took off his serape and belt, hung his rifle on the pommel, and drew his bowie, a weapon nearly eighteen inches long, and advanced upon the pair.

"You will make a good strike if you put me on my back, my slippery sons," he said, in a jocular tone. "I have a thousand dollars in gold in my saddle-bags, and my mustang is worth three hundred."

"We will take care of them," retorted Gozo, with a sardonic grin. "*Mit demonios!* Do you know that I am the first swordsman of Monterey?"

"I have heard so," replied the Texan, who was attaching his knife to his wrist by a sort of band. "So I will take you first. Are you going to attack me, or must I begin?"

The two Mexicans sprung at him sword in hand. They had scarcely taken a step, when something flashed through the air, and struck the exposed bosom of Gozo. It was the bowie of Zebra Zack, which had been hurled with all the force of his powerful arm, and with a precision only gained by long practice. The Mexican staggered back, and made a clutch at the knife, but the ranger gave a quick tug at the short rawhide cord which was fastened to his wrist, and the knife fell at his feet. Mendoza had not much heart for the battle, and when he saw his comrade's blood, he turned, with a yell of terror, and ran for his horse. Zack would have followed, but Gozo, bloody from his breast to his feet, suddenly

assailed him with all the impetuous courage of despair. He knew that he was mortally wounded, and his only hope now was that he might slay the Texan, and so avenge his own destruction. He had told the truth when he vaunted his skill with the sword, and Zebra Zack found his hands full. But, if Raphael Gozo was skillful with the sword, he was not yet a match for the Texan. The heavy-bladed bowie formed a wall of steel about him, which the Mexican could not break through. He tried every point of attack, and every trick of sword play, likely to give him an opening. But, if the bowie is not good for the attack, it is magnificent for defense, and as long as Zack did not think of attack, he was safe. He could see that the Mexican was growing weaker, and while he continued to attack with all the ardor of despair, his blood was dropping from his mortal wound.

"Mendoza, Mendoza!" he cried, in a dying voice. "Come to me, and give me help."

But the coward was intent upon other game. He had gained the saddle, and, remembering what had been said about the money in the saddle-bags, he determined to possess himself of it. For this purpose he was already approaching the striped mustang, and his hand was extended to reach the saddle-bags, when Gozo's cry for help came to his ears. Zebra Zack sprung back, and saw what his enemy was doing.

"*At him, Zebra!*" he yelled.

The mustang uttered a fierce scream, and sprung at Mendoza, open mouthed, while the Mexican's horse wheeled suddenly, and darted across the prairie. Mendoza no longer thought of the gold, but how to escape from the mad steed, darting after him, full of rage. Zack saw that his mustang was leaving him, and uttering a loud whistle to recall him, even while he parried a thrust from Gozo, he turned back to end the battle, which was nearly over, for Raphael was failing fast.

"This for Crockett!" Zack cried, turning aside the sword and darting in, plunging the knife to the hilt in the bosom of the Mexican. "This for Bowie!" withdrawing the knife, and thrusting again. "Ha; he is rubbed out, and I can mark his name on my list. But, Mendoza first; he must not escape."

Leaving Gozo rolling on the sod, in the agonies of death, he ran to meet his mustang, which was trotting back slowly. A whistle quickened his pace, and Zack flung himself into the saddle.

"Away, Zebra!" he shouted. "Show your speed, if you never showed it before."

The form of Mendoza was now a mere shadow in the gloom, as he rode for life. He had calculated upon some moments more, and in that time he could have lost sight of his pursuer, but Zack had been too quick.

The mustang seemed to share the feelings of his master, and stretched out like a hunter upon the chase. Mendoza heard the sound of hoofs, and knew who followed, and with a shriek of terror, he drove in his spurs, turned his horse's head for the chaparral, and rode as he never rode before. The wind cut by his ears with a whistling sound as he dashed on. He knew the pitiless nature of the man behind him, for who had not heard the name of Zebra Zack in the country to the north of San Antonio? Who had not heard of the man, who, single handed, had ridden down into the midst of a band of seven Mexican guerrillas, and put them to flight? Of the man who was attacked by a jaguar in the chaparral, and strangled the brute with his bare hands. He was a moody, discontented man, who lived alone upon the prairie, and loved no man who did not hate the Mexican race.

Ride hard, descendant of the Cid! Drive in your spurs, degenerate son of Cortez and Alvarado, for a fiercer than Cortez rides behind. On, on, through the moonlight, the hares scattering as you fly, and the prairie wolf giving place. Stretch your limbs, strong son of Arabian sires, and bear your master on, for one of your own blood thunders in your rear.

Mendoza looked over his shoulder, and saw that the distance between him and the coming avenger was growing less as he rode. He could dimly see, in the moonlight, the giant form of the ranger, bending forward in the saddle, urging his horse on. The beat of the coming hoofs sounded ominously in his ears.

"Turn, coward, turn!" screamed Zack. "Would you have me shoot you in the back?"

But Mendoza did not pause, for he had not the heart to look into those burning eyes, and meet his doom. He heard the click of the lock, and knew that his enemy was cocking a pistol.

"Mercy ! mercy !" he screamed. "I did not kill Crockett."

"Dog ! You could not kill him, but you could insult him as he lay dead. Turn, I say, or I will fire."

CHAPTER II.

THE MAIDEN OF THE MASK

THE flying man knew the fatal aim of the avenger, but knew as well that he must surely die by a more terrible death than the bullet if he stayed his onward course. Instead of halting, he flung himself suddenly out of the saddle, only the toe of his boot visible above it, one hand writhed in the mane of his horse, while his body was concealed behind that of the animal. No one, except a Mexican or an Indian, could have performed this feat, but Mendoza was a peerless horseman, and if his horse had been equal to the Zebra, he might have escaped. Enraged at his obstinacy, Zebra Zack sent a bullet through the exposed foot, with an accuracy of aim which was wonderful, in the uncertain light of the moon. Mendoza uttered a yell of pain and rage, but still kept his position ; in that lay his only salvation. But this could not last long, for the Zebra was gaining at every stride, and he expected every moment to feel the deadly bullet.

"Turn, you coward !" shouted Zebra, again, urging his horse forward. "Turn, and die like a man, as Raphael Gozo did. Fool ! You cannot escape the vengeance of Zebra Zack."

The only reply was a bullet, fired from beneath the neck of the horse, which plowed a deep furrow along his neck, close to the jugular vein. An inch to the right, and the career of the ranger would have been over forever. Drop-

ping back a little, so as to be out of the range of the pistol, he aimed to "crease" the flying mustang, a cruel method of capture, often employed by professional mustangers. Sore in his aim, his bullet plowed through the neck of the mustang, and brought him to his knees, throwing Mendoza out in front, where he alighted in a heap, half-stunned by the shock. Zebra Zack dashed up, weapon in hand, when a loop of rawhide suddenly settled over his shoulders, and pinioned his arms to his side, plucking him out of the saddle quickly, and, for the moment, leaving him helpless, and dizzy. He staggered to his feet in time to see a swift horseman galloping about him, encircling his arms with half a dozen coils of the rope.

"Be easy, senor," said a clear voice. "You are my prisoner."

The horseman rode straight at him, with a gleaming pistol ready for use, and Zack called out that he surrendered. The horseman rode nearer, and bending forward, looped the lasso over his arms, much as a line is fastened to a hook. Zack uttered a cry of surprise for he saw that his captor was a woman!

"The devil! Caught by a girl, after all these years!"

"I have caught better men than you, senor," replied the girl, coming nearer. "Why were you trying to kill this man?"

"Because he is my enemy," answered Zack. "Because he is a bloody villain, who has cumbered the earth too long."

"It may be as you say, senor, but I could not stand idly by and see my cousin shot down like a dog."

"Look here, senora," cried Zack. "Let me tell you that he had a fair chance for his life. I gave him and Raphael Gozo their swords, and fought them with only my knife; and if he had stood up like a man, I don't know who would have won. But he ran before he was touched, and left Gozo to die by my hand."

"Then Raphael Gozo is dead? You have killed a bitter enemy of mine, and saved me from much trouble. Hal! What are you going to do, Carlos Mendoza?"

The Mexican had gained his feet, and had a pistol in his hand, with which he walked straight up to Zebra Zack.

"I am going to shoot this scoundrel through the head, and rid the world of a demon," was Mendoza's fierce rejoinder.

"He was right to call you a coward," replied the girl, in an angry tone. "Santa Maria! If you do not lower that weapon, I will put a bullet through you, though you were my cousin a thousand times. What! Kill a prisoner, a man who cannot lift his hand to prevent you? I have half a mind to cut the lazo, and let him do his will with you."

"Demonios!" hissed Mendoza. "Do you dare to come between me and vengeance?"

"It seems that you do not know me after all, Carlos. Have you not seen enough of me already, to be certain that you cannot frighten me by bluster?"

"You must let me kill him, or you make me your enemy."

The girl urged her horse between him and the prisoner, and leveled her pistol at his head.

"Drop your weapon!" she cried. "I shall not bid you twice."

"Zada!" he expostulated, in an imploring tone. But the flash of her dark eyes awed him, and the pistol dropped from his extended hand.

"That is well; now take your horse and ride away. Leave your escopete and pistols, and I will carry them to the hacienda, and leave them there for you."

"Why should I give up my weapons?" he protested.

"Because I bid you do it, and you know better than to disobey me."

"At least I shall take this horse," he said, advancing toward the striped mustang.

"I shall fire if you lay a finger on him," firmly declared the girl.

"Let him take Zebra if he can," suggested Zack, with a laugh. "Only try it, base-hearted dog, and he will tear you into pieces, and trample you under his feet. Why don't you take him? You tried it once to-night."

"Curse the beast!" growled Mendoza. "I don't want him."

He walked toward his own horse, the girl following closely. As he took the escopete from his saddle, he cocked it.

suddenly, and whirled on his heel, but it was only to look into the muzzle of a pistol, six inches from his nose.

"*Mil demonios !*"

"I know you pretty well, Carlos. Lay down the weapon, throw down that pistol, and begone."

"What are you going to do with that fellow?" demanded the Mexican, as he obeyed her sullenly. "I warn you that he has killed Raphael Gozo in cold blood."

"What right have either of you on this side of the Rio Grande? You best know why you came here, and what mercy you may expect from Texans. I warn you that you are suspected, and that the north chaparral may conceal secrets which will one day be unveiled. Go your way, and when you have reclaimed your property, never come near the Hacienda del Solida again, for you will not be welcome."

"This, to your cousin?"

"I claim no kinship with a coward. Raphael Gozo was a bad man, but he had what you will never possess, a brave heart."

"I shall remember these words in the future. I ask you again what do you mean to do with your prisoner?"

"That is *my* business."

"But I must know. If you do not tell me, I will go to the alcalde and inform him of this murder."

"It would please me mightily to see you face the alcalde of San Antonio, and tell him that Zebra Zack is a murderer. Fool! A son of the alcalde died in the Alamo, and he might remember that you were there. He shoots mighty close, does Old Pap Bliss."

"Zada, will you let this tiger live to follow me and take my life?"

"Keep on your own side of the Rio Grande, and you will be safe," replied Zada. "Now go, for you only waste my time."

He mounted, with a look of deadly malice, stuck a threatening finger in the face of the girl, and rode away rapidly in the direction of the north chaparral, urging his wounded steed with knife and spur.

"I don't see what you made by playing that game, my lady," said Zack. "You have made two enemies instead of

one, and you ought to have let him plug me through the head."

"Do I look like a woman likely to allow a murder to be done? Senor, do not be my enemy, I pray you. I saw a man pursuing my cou-in, seeking to take his life. The lazo was in my hand; a single throw would save him, and I made the cast. I am almost sorry that I did it now, for he will hate me from this hour."

"Release me, and I give you the word of an honest man that he shall trouble you no more."

"Would you have me undo the work so well begun? He shall go free for this time, for I will not release you."

"Then finish your work, and let the long grass cover the bones of Zebra Zack; for I swear to you, if I do get free, that I will take his trail and kill him."

"You hate him very much."

"And I have a reason. Not even to you will I tell why I hate him, but he is marked for death. Girl, do you know what it is to ride across the prairie, followed by accusing ghosts, the ghosts of slaughtered friends, who point their fingers at you, as at one who has not done his duty? Throw off this lazo, and let me be gone, or kill me where I stand."

"Senor," protested the girl, "your wrongs are doubtless great, and I pity you. I know my cousin Carlos, and that he has the heart of a hare, and the cruelty of a tiger. He has no doubt deserved death at your hands, but I can not let you go free unless you promise not to follow him to-night."

"I can promise that," answered Zack, "for the moon is almost down. How is it that you are alone on the prairie, so late at night?"

"I have been on a visit to a friend, and returned late."

"Do you not fear to ride alone?"

"What should I fear, senor? I have my weapons, a good horse under me, and a brave heart. Trust me, there are few who ride these vast plains with less fear in their bosoms than I."

He looked at her closely by the light of the moon. He saw a light, graceful figure, seated astride in the saddle, dressed in the half military style so much affected by the aristocratic Mexican equestrienne. A scarlet jacket, bound with

gold braid, was fitted neatly to her form. Below this, she wore a blue petticoat of rich material, Turkish trousers, fastened at the ankle, and natty little boots, with silver spurs. Over this was thrown a *rebosa* of nearly the same color as the jacket, and on her head was a light sombrero, with a drooping feather. The belt about her waist sustained a pair of elegant pistols, and a beautiful dagger with a golden hilt. Over her face for some reason she wore a light crepe mask.

"I think I know you, *senora*," he said, "although your face is covered. You are *Senora Zada del Solida*, the daughter of the *haciendado*."

"You have me," she admitted, throwing off her mask, and revealing a beautiful face, in keeping with her figure. "You have doubtless heard of my wild deeds, and despise me as I deserve."

"I have heard of you as the bravest girl in Texas, who alone, among the Mexican women, dared to upbraid Santa Anna for the butchery he winked at in his officers and men, at the Alamo. Throw off the lariat, for you have nothing to fear from me."

"You forgive me for taking you, then?"

"I could not ask for a fairer captor," replied Zack, as she unrolled the lazo from his arms. "You did the trick beautifully, and it was well for Mendoza that your hand was steady, and your aim true. But, you have saved an ingrateful dog, who will one day make you trouble, unless I have forgotten how to read faces."

"You are Zebra Zack? You have a terrible reputation along the Mexican border; even mothers lull their children to sleep by speaking your name."

"Yet I never harmed an innocent man or woman in all my time. Those who have fallen by my hand were demons, and deserved death. You look at my wild face and long beard, and think that solitude has changed me into a brute. You are wrong, *senora*, for no man on earth loves society better than I; but, until my work is done, I can not return to civilization, or enter a human abode, except to do my work. You must get on, however, for the moon will be down in half an hour, and it is quite a ride to the *hacienda*."

"I do not fear it."

"There are jaguars about."

"So I have heard; and yet I do not fear."

"If you will accept my escort, I will see you to the river."

"I never made a mistake in a face in my life," she answered. "Your rough beard and dress cannot hide your heart from me. You are a brave, true man, driven to desperation by a great wrong."

"You are right," he exclaimed, "and I am proud to think that you know how to read me as I am. Again, I say, let us move on."

He uttered a low whistle, and his horse bounded to his side. He took up the escopete and pistols, which the Mexican had given up so unwillingly, thrust the pistols into his belt, and laid the escopete across his saddle. Zada had coiled her lasso, and hung it on the pommel, and they rode away together across the breezy prairie, neither holding a thought of evil at heart. They trusted each other as all true hearts trust, although one was so beautiful and the other so rude in appearance.

"You spoke in a strange way of El Chaparral del Norte," said Zack. "May I ask what you meant by it?"

"I think that if that chaparral were searched by those who know how, and have brave hearts, we should find the authors of those crimes which have so shocked this border of late."

"Ha!"

"You have suspected it before?"

"Yes; and I suspect something more. Your good cousin Carlos has something to do with these hidden villains. What say you to that?"

"I have more than suspected it, but if I were sure that he had anything to do with those hideous murders to the east, I should curse myself for having saved his life."

"You robbed me of my revenge, but in that you only followed the impulses of your own good heart. There will come a day when you will not be near with your lasso, and I shall mark another name on my list of victims."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Some day you shall know, but of this be assured: you and yours are safe from me. Hark!"

They heard the rapid beat of hoofs, coming up from the rear, and very close upon them. A rattling volley was heard and the shots hurtled about them without doing harm.

"Do you want to kill the lady?" shouted Zack, at the top of his voice. "Ride for your life, senora; trust me to keep these fellows back."

"I will not leave you."

"But you must; what can you be but an incumbrance to me, for I should be thinking of your safety, and should fight like a coward. Ride as you never rode before, and reach the river if you can."

Both horses were at full stretch, and the distance between them and the pursuers had not lessened. But some of them were loading as they rode, for they could hear the rattle of the ramrods in the steel barrels.

"It is cowardly to leave you alone," she cried. "I am armed as well as you."

"If not for your life, for your *honor*, girl. These demons know not the name of mercy."

She turned pale, and dashed on alone, while he wheeled his horse, to meet the advancing troop, coming on at a gallop. The moon was then sinking, and utter darkness would soon cover the prairie.

"Thank God for that," he muttered. "I may save myself as well as the girl."

He stood like a statue while the yelling troop advanced.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLOOD-MARKED SADDLE.

He waited, until he could distinguish the moving figures in the gloom, and then his fierce voice rung out like the blast of a trumpet.

"Hurrah for the Lone Star! Charge, boys, charge; give them hail Columbia!"

With his bridle in his teeth, a revolving pistol in each

hand, this brave man rode down upon his unknown enemies, as recklessly as if they had been children. He kept his fire until within ten paces, when his revolvers—weapons new and strange to the Mexicans—began to speak. Amid this strange fusilade he came down upon them like the wind, and the shouts of a hundred men seemed to follow him. It was too much for the midnight assailants, who broke and scattered in every direction as if Houston's army had been at their heels, while after them rode Zebra Zack, blazing away with his revolvers, and followed by the ghostly voices.

"So far, *good*," exclaimed Zack, reining in the Zebra, after the last charge had left the barrel. "I rather think those fellows have got all they want, and something to spare. Now let us see whether I can find the little girl."

He turned back, and rode on at a footpace, loading his pistols as he went. When this work was done, he placed them in his belt, and urged his tireless steed on in the direction taken by the flying girl. As he rode, there passed by a riderless steed, and he looked after it in surprise.

"It can't be that anything has happened to the girl," he muttered. "It turned dark so suddenly that her horse may have put his foot in a hole, and thrown her."

The animal, after passing, had paused a little way off, and Zebra neighed loudly. A moment more, and the beast came trotting up, and Zack seized the bridle.

"I s'pose it belongs to some of those Greasers that laid down to rest," he said, grimly. "But, I want to be sure, you know."

He thrust his hand into a pocket of his hunting shirt, and drew out a box of matches, wrapped in buck-skin, and struck one of them on his heel. The match burned only for a moment but long enough to show him the animal which Zada had ridden, with blood upon the saddle and the stirrup. He uttered a strange, half-howling cry, let go the bridle, and rode rapidly in the direction she had taken, while Zada's horse followed him wherever he went. Now and then he stopped and called her name, but only the sighing wind replied.

"She is gone," he cried. "Either she is dead, or cannot hear me. Oh, my God; how shall I find her?"

He rode to and fro along the prairie, careless of danger to himself, calling on her name. But the girl did not reply, and at last he picketed his panting steed, flung himself on the grass, careless of the centipedes and tarantulas, and slept until the gray light of morning appeared. As he started up from the grass, and looked for his horse, he saw a body of men crossing the prairie a few furlongs distant, and recognized the peculiar organization of Indian and guerrilla fighters, the Texan Rangers. Flinging himself into the saddle, he rode down to them, and was greeted by uproarious shouts, for they knew and loved him.

The motley group surrounded him, shaking hands, yelling, firing off pistols, and in various rude ways testifying their joy at meeting him. The leader of the party, a stalwart, dark-haired, handsome youth of twenty-two, was shaking hands with Zack, when one of the party gave a warning whistle.

"Kimmanche, I hopes," said one of the rude borderers. "I ain't tuk a bountee in so long that it w'd be mighty refreshin' ter see ha'r. It is:—no it ain't! Why; blame my ears, kumrad's, ef they ain't Grasers!"

The supreme tone of contempt in which this last phrase was uttered was simply unapproachable. The despised "Greasers" were crossing the last roll of the prairie, a noble looking band, flashing in gold and silver bullion and colored serapes; while with the rangers, grease, buck-skin and dirt seemed to be the "ruling passions." A stranger to the ways of the Texans would have said that the brilliant band would scatter them like chaff, but when they came to know the character of the men who composed that savage band, they would have thought better of it. Scarcely a man among them who was not a seasoned Indian-fighter, who made his pastime of war, fighting from mere pleasure, and looking upon death as one of the possibilities, and if it came; "rubbed out, fighting; he was game," was all the epitaph they wanted.

Of the Mexicans very few among them but felt the desire to dig his heavy spurs into his horse's sides, and put out for "timber." Three or four gentlemen, one of them in a rich but unpretentious costume, and the rest in the gaudy attire

of Mexican officers, separated themselves from the rest, and advanced at a rapid trot to meet the rangers. In their midst, looking pale and angry, rode Carlos Mendoza.

"I know that old gentleman," said Harry Bliss, the captain of the rangers. "It is Del Solida, the hacendado, and he is a good man, if he is a Mexican. Don't touch a weapon boys; you won't need them."

The four Mexicans advanced rapidly, and Harry Bliss, with two or three more, spurred out to meet them, and they saluted.

"Senor Bliss," said Del Solida, a handsome old gentleman, with a pure Spanish face, "I am delighted beyond measure to meet you with your rangers. I have had a great loss, my daughter, a darling girl, as you well know, has been stolen from me."

"Zada!"

"Yes, last night."

"Heavens; where was she?"

"She rode out yesterday morning to visit Carlotta Gomez at her father's rancho. She is so brave that she will never take a guard, and in returning at night, she fell into the hands of that mad wretch Zebra Zack. What he has done with her, whether he killed her or holds her a prisoner, I can not tell; but she is certainly in his hands."

"Zebra Zack? If you know him, and will take the trouble to look, you will see him among my men."

The hacendado started, and ran his eyes over the ranks of the rangers, until they rested on the face of Zebra Zack, sitting like a statue upon the back of his strangely marked steed.

"Call him," said Del Solida, briefly.

Harry Bliss turned in his saddle and called to Zack to approach. He rode out at once, and seeing del Solida whom he knew well, he extended his right hand to shake.

"I can not take your hand," said the Mexican. "There is blood upon it."

"If there is blood upon my hand, Senor del Solida," replied Zack, "it is the blood of a man who had a chance to fight for his life."

"You lie!" cried Carlos Mendoza. "It is the blood of a woman."

The hand of the ranger dropped to the hilt of his knife, and for a moment it seemed as if he would attack the scoundrel in the midst of his friends. Mendoza shrunk back, with a cry of terror, and Harry Bliss laid his hand upon Zack's arm.

"Be careful, old boy."

"I'd kill him in a church," replied the ranger, fiercely. "What does the dog mean about killing a woman; who woman has been killed?"

"Zada del Solida!"

"Yes, you black hearted dog; and who killed her?"

"You!" replied the Mexican, boldly.

"Let me ask a few questions, Zebra," said Harry Bliss. "I can not for a moment believe that there is any truth in those statements, for you are not the man to raise your hand against a woman, and most of all such a woman as Zada. When did you see her last?"

"Just before the moon went down, last night."

Harry Bliss looked at him in astonishment.

"Where was she?"

"On the prairie, about two miles from the lower point of El Chaparral del Norte."

"This agrees with the story of Carlos Mendoza," said Del Solida. "How did you happen to meet her there?"

"I had been fighting with Raphael Gozo and Mendoza, two men whom I have sworn to kill like dogs. This coward, Mendoza, ran, leaving his comrade to fight me alone, and when I had dropped him, I mounted and rode after Mendoza, and had nearly caught him, when the girl slipped up behind, flung a lasso over my head, and pulled me out of the saddle. Before I could lift a hand, she had wrapped the lariat about my arms half a dozen times, and had a pistol at my head."

"So far you agree with Mendoza, except that he was chasing *you* instead of the reverse."

"Look you, Mendoza," said the ranger, drawing a pistol. "How was that; did I chase you, or did you chase me?"

Carlos looked into the stern eyes of his enemy, and told the truth! Zack returned the pistol with a grim smile.

"It beats all nature how persuasive I can be when I excuse," he said. "Shall I go on with the story?"

"Yes," replied Del Solida.

"I had been forced to shoot Mendoza's mustang, because the blamed coward was laying along his horse's side, and shooting under the neck; and I did not want to take any such chances as that. Just then I felt the lasso, and after I had surrendered, this dog wanted to shoot me, when I could not lift my hand. But the girl drew on him, and offered to shoot him through the head if he did not drop the pistol and he kinder dropped it."

"Could I fight with a woman?" grumbled Mendoza, hanging his head.

"No, I don't think you could," replied Harry Bliss. "If any one were to ask me the question, I should say you could not fight a land turtle. Go on, Zack."

"She made him leave his pistols and escopete, and ride away, and he put out for the North Chaparral, as it seemed to me, to get help."

"Liar!" screamed Mendoza.

"You are mighty free with that word, my son," said Zack, again laying his hand upon a weapon. "Now look at me; if you open your clam again, except some one asks you, I'll send you something which will keep you quiet for several days. When I get through, you may agitate your jaw."

"Be quiet, Mendoza," said Del Solida.

"Must I stand quiet and hear myself calumniated?" replied Mendoza.

"You'd better try to bear up under it, or it may be the worse for you. After a while the girl let me loose, when I promised not to go after this skunk that night. I knowed who she was now, and do you think I am the man to hurt the only girl in Texas who dared tell Santa Anna that the men who took the Alamo were murderers? You know me too well for that, Harry Bliss."

"It is idle to ask me to believe you guilty, old boy; and there is no man in Texas who will do more to find out the truth than I. Zada del Solida loved me, and I loved her; but we waited for more peaceful times before we asked consent."

"I did not know it, Senor Bliss," said the hacendado. "You are a gallant young man, of good family, and I would

have given her to you gladly enough, had you asked me. Even now—"

"You forget me," hissed Carlos Mendoza. "I have a better claim than any of these cursed Americanos."

"We will settle that some other time," said Harry Bliss. "If you dispute her love with me, there is a manly way to square it, with weapons in our hands. I should be happy to exchange shots with you, Senor Mendoza."

Mendoza became suddenly mute, for he took no pleasure in quarreling with men who were so ready to resort to deadly weapons.

Zack went on with his story, and although Mendoza would have liked to interrupt him, he feared that his enemy would keep his word, for his hand was very near a pistol as he talked.

"Have you done?" demanded Mendoza, when he had finished.

"Yes."

"Then I have the right to speak, without being shot down in cold blood."

"Go it."

"You say that the girl was very friendly with you, and set you at liberty as soon as you asked her?"

"Not quite; I had to promise not to follow you that night."

"And you dare to say that, in order to cover her flight you turned back alone, and attacked an unknown number of men in the darkness?"

"I don't reckon I would have done it by daylight," replied Zack, "because they would have seen through my tricks. Why, man; they were Greasers, just like you, and they've got so used to running when the Texas boys are 'round, that they can't get over the notion. I should say I chased full twenty of them, nigh on to a mile."

"I don't doubt it in the least," declared Harry Bliss. "And if Lieutenant Mendoza does, I shall consider it a personal insult, and act accordingly."

It was evident that the young captain of rangers was not averse to a personal encounter with Carlos Mendoza. On the contrary, that individual had no desire for any such combat, and put on a sneering smile.

"You are at liberty to believe that one man can chase a regiment, Captain Bliss. It is plain to me that you care more for the safety of this man than for Zada."

"It is false. All I say is this: Zebra Zack is merely incapable of doing this base murder. He is a brave man, hating some members of your race, yourself included, and we are not going to interfere with private revenges. If you can get the better of him in a manly way, do it, and no one will trouble you. But when you come to lie away his life, you may find some one in the way."

"Senor del Solida," demanded Zack, "do you believe that I could do this murder?"

"No!" replied Del Solida. "I have known you long, and although you hate my countrymen, doubtless with good cause, I cannot believe that you have not spoken the truth."

"I thank you. And you other gentlemen; what is your opinion?"

He turned to the two Mexicans who accompanied Del Solida.

"We are in doubt," replied one of them. "Many things in your story seem improbable, and we cannot reconcile them with other facts."

"Then I can only say this: take me before the alcalde of this district, and give me a fair trial. If the jury vote against me, I will go to my death without a murmur. But I swear to you, by everything which I hold holy and pure, that I would give my life to save that of Zada del Solida, since Harry Bliss loves her."

"I believe you, Zebra," said Del Solida. "Still, perhaps it is better that you should stand your trial before the alcalde."

"I am willing," answered the ranger. "But, what is the use, after all? We have heard the testimony of all who witnessed the affairs of that night, and could vote at once without the trouble of organizing a court."

"Perhaps other witnesses might be found," said Mendoza, with a sneer.

"What witnesses? You said yourself that we three were alone."

"Stand your trial, and let us see."

"I am willing, as I said before ; take me before the alcalde at once."

"The alcalde is on hand, like a wart on a finger," said a gruff voice. "Let's get to work without any fooling."

CHAPTER IV.

A TEXAN JUDGE.

IN the short period during which Texas was a Republic, before they thought proper, for their own safety, to link their fortunes with those of the United States, the government was a novel one, and so continued some months after her admission. The men were necessarily of the rough border stamp, and as such, their manners of administering justice were of the most primitive description. They had a code of their own, and the jury gave in a verdict in accordance with the facts, weighing well all extenuating circumstances, but giving criminals little mercy. With them, a horse-thief was as well worthy of death as a murderer, and in some cases, regarded as even more guilty. It would have been hard, with a Texan jury, to convict a Texan of the murder of a Mexican in fair fight, for as yet there was hot blood between the two nations, and the Mexicans only sought a pretext to attack the Lone Star, and take their revenge for San Jacinto, where their pet general was so roughly used by the Texan riflemen.

The man who now advanced, had come up in the rear of the rangers, while the consultation of leaders was going on, and had at once pushed to the front, amid the suppressed cheers of the Texans. He was a person well advanced in years, probably sixty years of age, with a bold, but hard featured face, expressing strong determination. His hair was gray, and bristled in a pugnacious manner ; and, indeed, this was his character. His dress was rough and ready, a flaming red hunting-shirt, sombrero, dark trousers and heavy horseman's boots, bearing spurs of fearful length. He carried

the long rifle, bowie, and pistols of the ranger, and seemed to know how to use them.

"Father!" cried Harry. "I am glad that you have come, for we need you."

"I reckon; waal, the old man is handy, like a pocket in a shirt. The alcalde is wanted—though why in thunder you will call me alcalde, instead of jedge, I don't know—and biz is biz. What's the racket now?"

They explained the position of affairs as rapidly as possible.

"It's all cussid foolishness," replied this rough diamond, "because you all know damned well that Zebra never killed the gal. However, I'm the man for jestice, and I like Senor del Solida better than any Mexican on top of the green earth, and jestice he shall have. First and foremost, we want a jury, and we ment as well choose one off-land. How shall it be done?"

"Six Greasers and six Texans," said one of the men, who rode out with Harry. "We want a fair shake."

"Does that suit, senor? speak quick, afore I fire, as Crockett said to the coon."

"I am perfectly satisfied," replied Del Solida. "Shall I choose my six?"

"Sartinly; Harry shall choose his side."

Senor del Solida named six Mexicans, including himself, but leaving Carlos out.

"I want to be on this jury," blustered the lieutenant, "and if we are to have justice, I demand it as my right."

"Who is this critter, that sets hisself up to blow before this yer court?" roared Colonel Bliss. "Stranger, take keer, I warn you, or blowed if I don't adjourn this court long enough to give you the wust lickin' you ever experiences, since the happy days of childhood. Am I the alcalde, or ar' you?"

"Why should I not be on this jury?"

"Because you are a witness, cuss you; the court won't accept you, because she thinks you a most eternal liar, without truth and without remorse. A blasted liar; a liar for fun! That's the opinion this court has of you."

"We shall get good justice from a man who questions my

truth before my testimony has been given," sneered Carlos.

"I must delegate my dignity to some one while I proceed to mount this pernicious and diabolical wretch," roared the alcalde, who had a profound respect for long words, when in the seat of justice.

"Keep quiet, or I shall be obliged to order you to return to the hacienda, Carlos," commanded Del Solida, angrily. "I know Colonel Bliss, and his rulings, although those of an unlearned man, are always just. Sir Alcalde, go on with your duty."

"Call up the rest of the jury, and order these other chaps to clear themselves out of the way. Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. The alcalde of this yer district, old Pap Bliss, sits on the judgement seat. Oh, git out of the way, you Mendoza; when I want you, I agree to send for you, don't I? Whar's the pris'ner? Oh, hullo, old man, you ar' in considerable of a fix, so to speak; but it does beat all natur' that any one could be fool enough to fotch you up on sech a charge. Here is the best patch o' shade I kin find, and I'll reest on this yer log. You jurymen, squat whar you kin, and we'll hear the evidence of the pris'ner. Sail in, old boy, and tell yer story."

"Wait a moment, your honor," said one of the Mexican jurymen, who had been a small lawyer in Monterey before he took up his present calling. "Should you not hear the testimony of the accusers first?"

"Now, durn my cats, if hyar ain't another Greaser going to teach me what to do in my own court. I hope the jurymen won't make it necessary fur me to descend from the seat of jestic and teach him manners; because I'm lit'rally spittin' fur a little commotion, and I hope I may never see the back of my neck if I don't knock all kinds of colors out of the next man that puts in his lip unless I ask him."

The jurymen became mute, for he knew that the state judge was likely to go even beyond his word, if necessary, to sustain his character for justice.

Zebra Zack told his story in much the same strain as before, only interrupted by questions from Colonel Bliss, so artfully worded as to redound to the advantage of the prisoner.

"That's a straight story from breast to back," said the judge. "Now trot up these critters who say that Zebra Zack would kill a gal. Let's have that skunk of misery, Mendoza. Oh, boys, he kin lie in a way that would amaze you, when he once puts his mind to it."

Mendoza was brought up, and told a tolerably straight story, while the judge interrupted him with sundry sniffs and snorts of disapprobation, as he approached the end.

"You see he don't know anything 'cept that he left the gal with Zebra," said the judge, "and ef it comes to a question whether Zebra or him tells the truth, Zebra is the boy I believe. Any more witnesses, you skunk?"

"Yes; call Pedro Diaz."

"What do you want of him?"

"Hear his evidence, and then call Malle Godena. You shall see whether there is any evidence or not."

Pedro Diaz, a dark browed, broad shouldered, murderous looking peon at once came forward and took the oath.

"Now, Pedro, my friend," said the alcalde, "it does surprise me that you should hev the face to come hyar, right in front of me, when you know how bad I've wanted you for nigh on to a year. You've come to give evidence ag'inst Zebra Zack, eh? Waal, we will see how it comes out, you low cuss. Go on with your story, and if you valley hide and flesh a picayune's worth, be mighty keerful and tell a straight lie, for ef I ketch you tripping, by the shade of Davy Crockett! I'll hang you to the first tree head downward."

"How can any man give evidence before such an alcalde as this?" cried Mendoza, in the background.

"Oh, say! There he is ag'in, the pizen cuss. He's give me more trouble than all the Greasers I ever struck, during the hull period of my existence. Harry, I ain't got time to fool with him, but if you love your father, take a lariat and wallop him until he howls."

"I will see to him," said Del Solida, rising in anger and shaking a threatening finger at his nephew. "Retire to the troop, Carlos, and do not come again until you are called."

Muttering curses below his breath, Carlos retreated, and Pedro, who had turned pale under the threats of the judge, began his story.

"Last night I was on the prairie, not far from El Claparral del Norte, with Malle Godena."

"What did you two critters go out to steal, Pedro?" asked the judge, in a questioning tone.

"I can not tell any thing while the alcalde continues to insult me," said Pedro, with an air of injured innocence.

"Go ahead; I always did admire to hear a Greaser lie," asserted this peculiar judge.

"We were after a jaguar, which had been seen in the chaparral that day—"

The judge uttered a perfect roar of laughter; some of the Mexicans smiled, for Pedro was known far and near as one of the greatest cowards on the face of the earth. And the idea that he would dare to attack a jaguar in the night, was simply ludicrous.

"You know Malle Godena, and if I am a little timid about jaguars, he is not. I went with him, confident that he is a match for any beast of prey, and would protect me. When we were lying in a crevasse, waiting for the jaguar, we heard the gallop of horses, and saw one man pursuing another, trying to kill him. As they came close, we knew them; the first was Senor Mendoza, and the second Zebra Zack."

"Oh, don't tell that old story over ag'in," frowned the judge. "Did Carlos Mendoza try to shoot Zebra when he was tied?"

Pedro looked helplessly about for Mendoza, but he was out of earshot, and he answered at a venture:

"No."

"Umph; go on."

"Lieutenant Mendoza mounted his horse and rode away, leaving Senora Zada with the prisoner."

"How wur it that he left the gal with Zack, if they parted good friends?"

"He went for help."

"What help did he want to take a man into camp, tied hand and foot? Your master might have been a coward, but the gal wasn't; that we all know. But go on with your yarn."

"The senora said that she would watch the prisoner while Mendoza brought help. She had a pistol in her hand, and

sat on her horse close to him. Somehow he cleared one hand from the cabiesta, and snatched at the pistol. She tried to shoot, but he caught her by the wrist, and in the struggle the pistol went off, killing her on the spot."

"Then it wur an accident, after all, ef you tell the truth. Zebra, in trying to git away, hurt the gal without meaning it. Say, Zebra, old fel', is thar an atom of truth in this yarn?"

"Not any; he is a worse liar than Mendoza, for he knows how to lie, and this black thief don't."

"Would I lie upon my salvation?" cried Pedro, throwing up his hands in holy horror.

"I reckon I don't know, critter," replied the judge. "What did Zack do after the gal was killed?"

"He took her in his arms, got on his striped mustang and rode away."

"You say that you and Malle were lying close by, and you let him kill the gal and make off, and never lifted a hand."

"We were afraid of Zebra Zack, who hates all Mexicans. I can say no more."

"Take him away," said the judge, "and bring in that Injan."

The man who came in was a gigantic fellow, a mixture of the Indian of the Pueblo race with the Spanish. He was well known in that section, where he pursued the avocation of a hunter, and it was thought had secret relations with the bands which raided across the Rio Grande from time to time. Whatever else might be said against him, he was a man of desperate courage, and feared by his enemies.

"Malle," said the alcalde. "We hev heard your friend tell his story, and now for yours. You need not tell the first part. Did Mendoza try to shoot Zebra Zack when he stood thar with his hands tied?"

The Indian nodded.

"Why did he not kill Zebra?"

"Girl won't let him; put up short gun, and scare him back."

"You see, gentlemen, this fellow has been in the habit of telling the truth, and a lie don't come natural to him," Zack suggested.

"Zebra get hand loose," continued the Indian, speaking as

though reciting a lesson. "Girl try to shoot; he ketch hand; she be shoot; that's all."

"What did he do with the body?"

"Leave it on ground," said the Indian. "Wolf eat him up."

"Non!" screamed Pedro. "You are a fool, Malle."

"Who fool?" cried the Indian, grasping his knife, and making a rush at Pedro. But the worthy witness vanished instantly, and Malle was dragged back into the circle.

"Malle will not talk," he cried. "You have fire; burn me, and see if I can be made to speak."

"I've heerd enough already," said the judge. "You kin go, Malle, and remember, we ar' on the watch, and one of these yer days we'll catch you on the hip. When we do, thar will be one less half-breed in Texas, that's all."

Malle gave him a look of defiance, and stalked haughtily away.

"I want that Pedro again," said the judge. "You kin see with half an eye, gentlemen, thet this yer cussid Mendoza hired these two beauties to tell thet blamed lie about Zack. But the trouble is, they couldn't teach that half-breed to lie. Pedro says he killed her and carried off the body; Malle says he killed her and left the body on the ground. It ain't in the character of Malle to let any man commit a crime like thet ar' and not take a shot at him. Mendoza will stick to his lies like a burr on a sheep; Pedro won't, so bring him back."

Harry and another started up, and sought out Pedro in the midst of his party. He tried to bluster, but the persuasive power of a leveled pistol was too much for him, and he concluded to go with them. When he reached the tree under which the jury was seated, he found that a lariat had been thrown over a limb, with a running noose on one end, and that two stout rangers held the other end.

"Critter," said the alcalde, solemnly. "We hev concluded to hang you in the fust place, because you ain't fit to live. Git down and say a prayer ef you know one afore you go up."

"Hang me, Senor Alcalde! Santa Maria; what have I done?"

"I reckon ef you s'arch yer conscience, you will know. We find you and Malle guilty of the murder of the gal."

"Zada del Solida?"

"Who else?"

"Bat, Senor Alcalde, am I tried for this murder? Have we not sworn that we saw Zebra Zack kill her? Oh, it was a mistake, senor; he did not mean to kill her, any more than you mean to hang me for his crime. I am sorry I spoke of the matter, if it is going to make trouble."

"We are satisfied that Zebra Zack did not kill Zada," said Senor del Solida. "And, as Mendoza had gone away and you, with Malle Godena, were the only ones near, as you have testified, then you must be in fault."

"Oh, mil demonios! In what a trap have I placed myself! But this is murder, senors; I did not kill the senora."

"Your own testimony convicts you," replied Del Solida. "Put the rope about his neck, Garcia; the villain deserves any death. If he had not sworn that he was near by, we should never have suspected him."

As the rope touched the neck of the coward he uttered a scream of terror, and fell upon his knees.

"Where is Mendoza?" he cried. "Where is he who brought me into this scrape, and now leaves me to my fate? I swore to a lie; do you hear me? I swore to a lie. I did not see Zebra Zack kill her."

"Keep silent!" cried Mendoza. "You fool, they are trying to frighten you, and if you escape them, you shall not escape me."

Harry Bliss thrust the speaker back rudely, and made a signal to the men who held the rope. It tightened steadily, and Pedro, clutching the rope with both hands, and wildly protesting, rose to his feet.

"I will tell the truth, gentlemen," he cried. "Release me, and I swear by my patron saint, blessed St. Salvador, that I will reveal all. Gentlemen, good senors, pity an unfortunate wretch. Senors, he tempted me with his gold, and promised me more if you hung Zebra Zack."

"He! Who do you mean?" cried Harry Bliss. "Let up a little, boys, and give him a chance to breathe."

"Oh thanks, Senor Bliss; this time I will tell the truth.

I was hired by Carlos Mendoza to tell this tale, but I saw nothing of it, I swear upon my honor."

"This looks like the truth," said Senor del Solila. "My dastardly nephew, fearing Zebra Zack, has taken this coward's mode of slaying him. Oh, my child, what has become of you? Where are you, daughter of my affections? Whether she is alive or dead, we can not tell."

"She's alive," declared Zebra Zack. "She is alive, and I shall find her, or die trying. Ask that liar where she is, and if he knows, he will tell the truth."

"Where is Zeda?" demanded del Solila.

"She is in—" The sentence was ended in a shriek of agony, and a stream of blood gushed out, staining the gaudy attire of the Mexican with a terrible dye. A ball had pierced his bosom, aimed so truly that his heart had been pierced, and his life went out with the single cry he uttered. At the same moment the entire force of Mexicans broke and fled in a dozen directions, and among them all it was impossible to say who had fired the shot. But, whether guilty or not, Pedro had gone to his account, without completing the sentence which would have informed them of the fate of the girl.

CHAPTER V.

THE LIPAN GUIDE.

THE jury broke up without the formality of adjournment, and the rangers sprung into their saddles at once. But a shrill whistle from the lips of Harry Bliss called them back. Accustomed to obedience to the man they had chosen for their captain, while they would have obeyed no other, they halted at once.

"Why do you stop us, captain? One of them ~~came~~ fired the shot, and we want to pay them back."

"Only one among them was guilty, and the rest fled through fear of the consequences of his rash act," replied Harry. "I don't need to tell you that Carlos Mendoza was

the man who fired, although what he feared from the revelations of Pedro, it is impossible for me to say. I suppose you are all satisfied that Zebra did not kill the girl?"

"We ain't durned fools, capt'in; we knowed before that Zebra Zick never did any seen murder."

"Thank you, boys," said Zebra. "Not only was the story false, but I am willing to risk my life to save the girl, for the sake of Harry Bliss. Senor del Solida, did it ever occur to you that your nephew might be in love with your daughter, and wished to make her his wife?"

"A poor lieutenant of lancers, and a base coward at that, Harry Zada!" cried the hacendado. "Understand me; I am not mercenary, and my daughter will have money enough, but the man she marries must prove himself worthy of her. Captain Bliss has proved his manhood, and if he had not a penny, he should have her."

"I'd match you, dollar for dollar, at that game, senor," said the judge. "Old Pap Bliss don't lack for ducats."

"You know that I have never questioned your wealth, senor; but, what we must do now is to find out what Pedro would have said, if he had not been stopped by a bullet. My daughter is not dead, but a prisoner, and we must seek that which was lost."

"I have an idea, gentlemen," suggested Zebra Zick. "You all know whether I am a good scout or not, and I am going to make you an offer. Give me two days, and in the mean time, let the rangers go into camp somewhere near the Hacienda del Solida, and wait for me. In two days I can carry out my idea, and if, when the time is up, you don't see me, look for me in El Chaparral del Norte."

"Why should we look there?"

"Because I believe that Zada, if kept a prisoner at all, is a prisoner in that place. If you came there in force, you would only drive them to harsh measures. I shall be alone, and they expect to see Zebra Zick adrift upon the prairie, like a homeless wanderer as he is."

"Darned if I don't like the plan," declared Old Pap Bliss.

"I move we take it."

"I bow to your decision, Senor Alcalde, for I have great faith in Zebra Zick."

The ranger looked to his arms, mounted, and rode rapidly away, not directly in the path to the chaparral, but aiming to strike it some miles from the point where he had encountered the two Mexicans. The Zebra skimmed over the surface of the prairie like a bird, and his master seemed to drink in the pure sweet air of the plains, all the sweeter from the fact that he had lately been tried for his life. For he knew Old Pap Bliss better than the Mexicans, and was well aware that if the crime had been proved against him, the lariat which he had seen about the neck of Pedro would have ended his days. As he dashed on over the plain, and passed the patch of timber where he had left the body of Raphael Gozo, he caught the glitter of steel among the trees and reined in the Zebra, with his hand upon a weapon. There was a slight commotion, and three Indians rode suddenly out of the cover, their lance-heads gleaming in the sun. The moment he saw them his hand dropped from the pistol, and he uttered a shout of welcome.

The Indians advanced, making their horses prance and curvet, while their brown bodies swayed to and fro, in perfect time with the motions of the horses. The leader was an Indian Apollo, a perfectly formed man in every respect, six feet in height, with a muscular development rarely seen except in the horse Indians. He rode a magnificent mustang, whose trappings glittered with barbaric ornaments, dancing in the sun-rays. His arms consisted of the lance, a hatchet nearly as heavy as an ordinary ax, and a long knife.

"Cocheto, my brother!" exclaimed Zack, extending his hand. "The Lipan chief is welcome to his friend."

"Cocheto has waited for Long Beard," replied the Lipan chief. "Why has he not visited the lodge of his brother for so many days?"

"Long Beard had work to do," replied Zack. "Even now, he is upon the trail, for his enemies have stolen the white maiden who lived in the stone lodge by the river."

"Hush!" cried the chief. "Show these enemies to Cocheto, and he will drink their blood."

"They have made a dark trail, and Long Beard looks for it," answered Zack. "Does my brother know *E! Chaparral*?"

del Norte ; and is it a good hiding-place for those whose deeds are evil ?”

“Cocheto knows the chaparral better than any other, for there are hidden the gods his people worshiped in the days when the red men ruled the land. See ; white men came across the water, and entered the land of the Montezumas. They conquered, and the Aztec gods fled before them. Still the white men followed, and the sun-god breathed upon the land, and the chaparral grew up about them hiding them from sight. A Lipan cannot go there, lest he betray the dwelling-place of the gods.”

“Let Cocheto listen,” said Zack, still speaking in the Lipan tongue. “The Mexicans are of the blood of those who conquered your people, and they are never weary of seeking after the lost gods. Even now I believe that they are in the chaparral, to desecrate the dwelling-place the gods have chosen.”

“Does my brother speak good words ? Is there no evil in his heart to his brother, Cocheto ?”

“Did Long Beard *ever* wrong Cocheto or his race ?”

“It is good ; I will search, and if I find the cowardly Mexicans in the dwelling-place of the gods, I will give them the sacrifice in which they delight, the sacrifice of blood.”

“There is more to tell. It is they who have taken the white girl prisoner. Shall Long Beard go with you, in your search ?”

“He is welcome ; the Lipan loves a friend who is brave.”

The chief turned to the two warriors who accompanied him, gallant looking braves, inferior to him in appearance, but far above the ordinary Indian. For the Lipans had ever shown themselves friendly to the Texans, and had heartily despised the Mexicans for their treachery and cowardice.

“Warriors !” he said. “Listen to the words of your chief. Return to the Lipan village, and when the sun rises again, be at the north pass with one hundred braves in their front. If Cocheto needs you, he will be there ; if he does not need you, he will be dead, and you must seek for him before the altar of the sun.”

The warriors nodded, and set off at a gallop, leaving Zack and his new friend together upon the plain.

"Come," was Cochetto's simple command; "we have no time to waste."

He touched his horse, and headed to the north, skirting the chaparral as he rode. No one who has never seen Texas has any idea of the vast extent of a Texan chaparral, or the difficulty of penetrating them to any great extent. The density of their undergrowth, the thorns of the mesquit—of which they are largely composed—the spines of the great cactus through which they must pass, and which tear the flesh like knives, make them almost impenetrable. And yet, these strange lands cover some of the grandest secrets of the ancient days. The land is barren and useless to the stock ranchers, who have the rich bottom lands and prairies at their will; but, amid the tangled growth, lie hidden the cities of the past, and the ancient temples in which the children of the sun worshiped. For, in their course from the north, the Aztecs stopped long enough in various localities to build up those wonderful temples which archaeologists study, and from whose walls they learn how great were the wealth and power of the Aztecs.

The chief rode in silence for over an hour, and, with such horses as they bestrode, an hour means many miles of travel. Zack followed without hesitation, for Cochetto had the air of one who knew what he was doing.

"You ask no questions, Long Beard?" he finally remarked. "You are not like other white men I have known, who must know why *this* is done, and why *that* is not done. You are a man who knows that every man has his place."

"That is it, chief. I give you credit for understanding this chaparral, which I do not."

"It is good. We are about to penetrate a place where I believed no white man had ever set his foot. You say that white men are there, and I know that you believe it, or you would not say it. The Lipans are proud of this secret, and if they thought it would be betrayed, they would not suffer that man to live to whom their secret was known. Lift your hand, and swear by the God you adore that you will not tell to any the secrets I will reveal this day."

"I give you the word of an honest man, who would not lie to save his life. Be contented with that."

"It is enough ; for awhile we must follow a rugged road."

He turned his horse's head into what seemed the most impenetrable portion of the thicket, but in reality a part which was more free from cactus and mesquit than any portion which they had passed. For half a mile they proceeded in silence, the chief leading the way until they reached a place where the tangled spines of the thorny plants were so thick that farther progress was impossible.

"We leave the horses here," explained the chief. "Drive the picket-pin into the earth, and we will go on."

"I must say that I don't see much chance of going on," Zack had to remark. "But you are the leader, and I think you know your business."

He leaped from the Zebra, picketed him in the most open space he could find, and waited for the chief. The Lipan stooped and crowded his body through the thorny leaves of the cacti, calling to his white friend to follow, and they crept on their hands and knees through an opening which had evidently been the work of man, for a distance of nearly a hundred yards. At last they reached a spot where they could stand erect, and brushing aside the earth with his moccasined foot, the Lipan showed a square stone set into the earth with a stone ring in the center. Grasping this ring with one hand, the chief raised the stone above the level of the earth, and then swung the end to one side, revealing a dark cavity and a flight of steps leading downward.

"Ala!" cried Zack ; "this is your secret, Cocheto?"

"Silence! You are about to come into the presence of the lost. In these temples beneath the earth dwell the Lipan gods, and no white man's foot has ever profaned it before. I do not know whether the gods will be angry because I have dared to do this. I deserve their anger, but I have faith in you."

"And you may trust me to the death, Lipan. Not to save my own life, not for the sake of vengeance, would I betray this secret; you have my word and I can not break it."

"Good ; go down."

Zack descended the steps without questioning, and heard the rattle of the stone as the Lipan replaced it in the groove in which it fitted so neatly. The Aztecs built well, as the

wonderful durability of the remains of their art attests. The passage through which they now pursued their way was cut through solid rock for the distance of nearly fifty feet, and the floor was as smooth as marble. Stretching out his hands on either side, Zack could feel the walls, and knew that the passage was barely four feet wide, and just high enough to permit the passage of a tall man without stooping. Soon the character of the walls changed, and he entered a vaulted passage, wider than the one they had just left, and which was reached by the descent of a dozen steps.

"Wait," said Zack. "Can't we have a little light on the subject? I should be glad to see what kind of a place we are passing through."

"We need no light; Cochetto knows every step of the way."

"But I would like to see this strange place."

"I have no light," responded Cochetto, coldly.

"I have, if you will allow me to light it."

"As you will," replied the Lipan. "I have your word that you will not speak."

Zack thrust his hand into his bosom, and brought out a small lantern about the size of a goose-egg, with a slide in front which uncovered a glass bull's-eye. He had matches, and in a moment more the lamp was lighted, throwing a narrow stream of light in front. It was enough, however, to reveal the white walls of the passage, covered with strange hieroglyphics, at which the Lipan gazed with awe.

"These are our histories," he explained. "Those who are learned can read upon these walls whence we came, and why the children of the Montezumas bowed the knee before the Spaniards. Wagh; the time has come when the children of the Aztecs set their feet on the necks of those who oppressed them."

The passage which they followed was not the only one in this strange underground retreat. Lateral passages joined it on either side, all showing the same perfect masonry, and the same system of emblematic writing. Perhaps, in the time to come, when these great ruins shall be unearthed we shall know more of the history of that wonderful people who fought so bravely against Cortez and his steel-clad legions.

"This is wonderful," exclaimed Zack, as they trod on through this world of wonder. "Who would have dreamed of this?"

"No one; the Lipans knew it, and only they. Wait; you have not seen all yet, as you will say soon."

The passage suddenly ended at a white wall, covered, as were the others, with hieroglyphics. Zack looked at his companion in surprise, and the Lipan answered with a smile.

"Shall we go back, my brother?" he asked in a sneering tone.

"Why should we go back? Cochetto the Lipan has not brought me here for nothing. There is a way by which we may go on, and dig deeper into the mysteries of this forgotten place."

"Has my brother no fear that the Lipan is leading him into a snare?"

"Is not his name Cochetto, the Lipan chief? Go; I am not a fool, and I know who goes before me."

"It is good," cried Cochetto. "My brother knows that his friend will not betray him. And if he has faith in the Lipan, the Lipan will have faith in him. See."

He touched a spring in the wall, and threw his weight against it. A stone door, artfully concealed, swung back upon its stone hinges, leaving the passage free. The moment the door opened, the Lipan threw himself upon his face and muttered to himself a prayer to the lost god, who dwelt in this secret temple. Zebra Zack stood silent, leaning upon his long rifle, until the invocations of the savage were finished.

"Do you fear to go on, my brother?" asked the chief, as he rose.

"Where you go, I can follow," was the reply.

The Lipan stepped through the door, and as Zack passed through, it closed with a hollow sound, and Zack stood petrified with astonishment, holding the lamp above his head.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WOMAN'S JAILER.

HE was in one of those grand temples which none knew how to build so well as the Aztecs.

The light which he held was reflected upon a thousand glittering points in a great circular room, with a lofty, vaulted roof. About the wall stood a hundred giant figures, carved in stone and wood. Each represented some inferior god of the Aztecs. The beauty of their attitudes was wonderful. Here was a giant form upon his knee, holding his shield above his head with one hand, while his right grasped a heavy javelin. There another figure, with the shield before his breast, waved in the air the double-bladed ax of glass, which the Mexicans so well knew how to use. On the right stood a powerful form holding a bunch of grapes over a golden cup. The eye at first was startled by the warrior array, but as it grew accustomed to the scene, it could take in the great wealth of this subterranean temple. The heads of the spears and axes were of pure gold. The white grapes which the giant held above the golden cup were pearls of the purest water. The eyes of the images, as they flashed in their myriad colors were emeralds, diamonds and amethysts.

"You only look at these," whispered the Lipan. "Behold the chief god, the god of war."

Zack followed his pointing finger, and saw him press his hand against the wall. Instantly a curtain which would never decay in the pure air of this earth-unborn place slipped rapidly aside, and there, blazing in diamonds, with his foot upon the neck of an enemy, and the sun shield blazing in one hand, towered aloft the Aztec god of war. The chief again fell upon his face, and lay there for full ten minutes, while Zack stood gazing, rapt in wonder, at the magnificent statue. Regarded simply as a work of art, it was grand, for it was of the purest marble, and carved with a skill rarely surpassed even in these days of progress. The mighty spear

which he held had a golden head, of full ten pounds weight, and the central diamond in his shield was worth a principality. As they gazed, a thundering voice was heard proceeding from the lips of the statue, and a shudder passed through the frame of the Indian, who had never dreamed that his god would break the silence of centuries.

"Son of the Lipans," the voice cried. "Why have you come to me? Be not afraid, for I know your life and it is good. Speak, son of Onesto, and tell me why you are here."

"I have heard that strangers have dared to set their feet in the lost city," replied the chief, "and I have come to avenge the insult offered to my god."

"You have done well. Who is this, whose long beard is like that of the fair god, Quetzl? Why should one of his race come to the last of the Aztecs?"

"He is strong and true, and will not betray me."

"Think you that I do not know this, oh Cocheto? Go on, and do your work, and if you find among the desecrators of my city a maiden who is a prisoner, give her back to her father. Go on, and be strong of heart, for I am with you, and will protect you even to the end."

"Shall the white man go with me?"

"Yes; it is my will."

"Come!" said Cocheto, rising. "Who will dare to say that my god is not mighty, when he has heard his words?"

Any one who had seen the peculiar look upon the face of Ze'ra Zack, might have thought that the speech of the marvellous figure had not astonished him much. As he passed along the stone passage to the back of the statue, something so much like laughter issued from his lips that Cocheto turned angrily.

"Who dared to laugh?" he cried. "Was it you, Long Beard?"

"Why should I laugh, Cocheto? Have I not heard the words of the mighty god, and do I not know that he is with us? You are favored above others of your tribe, for I think you told me that the god has been mute for many years."

"It is true; Cocheto is favored above his fathers, and their fathers before them. Let us on."

He had not proceeded far, when they came to another wall,

which barred their onward way. But Cochetto found a passage, and another door swung open showing a second flight of steps, ending in a stone like that which he had lifted at the commencement of their underground journey. He raised this cautiously, and entered a large square room with stone walls, united by the famous Mexican cement. To leave this he ascended another flight of steps, and as he reached the top, he held out his hand for silence, put his ear to the floor above and listened. Not a sound was heard, save the low breathing of his companion, and grasping the stone above him he gave it a push to one side, and sprung through, falling prostrate upon a grassy slope in the midst of a growth of cactus.

"Stand up!" he whispered.

Zack rose at once, and could hardly repress an exclamation of surprise. The cactus grew upon a rising ground, and screened them from view. There was an opening in the leaves, seemingly natural, upon the southern side, and through this Zebra Zack looked in upon a strange scene.

The remains of a city of the Aztecs lay before them. Time had done its work with the roofs of the buildings, and not one of the dwellings was covered. But the walls stood there, strong and firm as ever, covered with green moss and creeping vines. The stains of centuries were upon the moss-covered stones, yet they could trace temple and tower, palaces and roads, and the humble homes of the middle classes. In its day, this had been a great and populous city, surrounded by a wall many feet in height. But ruin was over all and a deposit of earth, century by century, had covered the walls, until it looked like a vast earthen embankment, overgrown by rank bushes and cactus, surrounding the crumbling ruins of the once populous city.

"Home of my fathers!" whispered the chief. "Proud city of a fallen race, one of your descendants, a chief who is poor, looks down with pity upon the pride of the plain. Woe is me, for the great nation, who built this city, are now no more. Death to the Spaniard and his descendants, the Mexicans, who brought this ruin upon you."

Zack laid his hand upon the arm of the Indian, and pointed to a figure which suddenly appeared at one of the doors

of a ruined building just below them. It was that of a Mexican officer, in the uniform of the lancers, with a handsome, devil-may-care face, and a reckless manner.

"Pedrillo!" he called.

A sergeant of the same regiment appeared, and bowed respectfully before the captain.

"Where is Mendoza?" demanded the captain. "The fellow thinks he can run away when he likes, and leave me in this cursed hole."

"He has gone to the hacienda, capitano; he was wounded in the foot by that cursed Zebra Zack, and wanted to get medicine. Besides, he has a plan to get this ranger out of his way forever."

"I shall be happy when this hide and seek game is over," grumbled the captain. "I may be a guerrilla, but I like fair fighting. However, if Ampudia will insist upon this kind of work, I suppose I must bear it. Where is the serenta? I must do something to pass away the time."

"You must be careful, capitano," said the man, with a laugh. "She has sharp claws, and knows how to use them. Gomez has the mark of her finger-nails upon his black muzzle, and will bear them for many a day."

"Tell her that Captain Marco, of the President's Guard, would be glad to speak with her."

"Have your own way, my capitano, if you will not be warned. I don't know what the lieutenant was thinking of, when he brought her here."

"I know that Captain Marco," whispered Zack. "He is a daredevil, one of the few gallant Mexicans I ever knew, and one whom I would not willingly injure. I am surprised he has anything to do with such a man as Carlos Mendoza."

"What care I?" replied the chief. "While he remains here, the secret place of the god of the sun is in danger of discovery. Ha; look there!"

They heard many voices outside the wall, and a number of heads appeared above it, as if the owners had climbed up laboriously. Forty or fifty men leaped the wall in rapid succession, shouting and laughing. All wore the uniforms of the lancers, and were evidently a part of the command of Captain Marco.

"You will need all your men, chief," whispered Zack. "Would it not be well for me to go back, and lead the rangers to your aid?"

"Do you think a hundred Lipan warriors need help to put down yonder crew?" returned the chief, scornfully. "You shall see what work we will make of them."

The man called Pedrillo had left his captain, and entered the ruined building. In a few moments he returned, followed by a young lady. At a glance Zack recognized Zada. She walked rapidly up to Captain Marco, and spoke to him in a loud, angry tone.

"You are Captain Valdez Marco, of the President's body-guard?"

"I am that fortunate individual," answered Marco, with a sweeping bow.

"You know who I am, captain?"

"Merely from report, senorita. I have heard that you were the belle of the San Antonio valley, and I have only to say that it surprises me that they have not long ago added the title, 'of Texas and Mexico,' for you have a right to it."

"Compliments are out of place here, captain. You see me here, a prisoner, and in the power of the man who ought to have protected me with his life, my cousin Carlos. I can not believe that you are in league with him in his persecution of a lady, and I ask you to set me free."

"And what should I do, in that case, my dear senorita? I am bored enough in this dismal place, without being left entirely to my own resources, as I should be if you abandon me. Don't think of it; stay here and keep me company."

"But, senor, I desire to return to my father," she cried, stamping her foot. "By what right do you keep me here?"

"My dear senorita, I do not keep you here."

"You refuse to set me free."

"Because I have nothing to do with the matter. I am assured by Lieutenant Mendoza that you are in possession of secrets connected with this expedition, which is of the utmost importance to the Mexican cause. He tells me that you are a Texan at heart, and have the very bad taste to love a *Tajano*, when so many worthy Mexican gentlemen are

dying for your sake. Under the circumstances, it would not be good policy to suffer you to depart."

"But, I tell you that I know nothing of the object you have in hiding here," she retorted. "Carlos Mendoza is a liar, and if you have consorted with him much, you ought to know it."

"You are hard upon my worthy friend, Mendoza. Say that he has a little of the Baron Munchausen in his character—and courtesy to you forbids me to deny it—he has at the same time a strong affection for you, and desires most ardently to make you his wife."

"Say rather that he has a strong affection for my father's broad lands, and herds of cattle and horses; for his strong box and jewel-case, *senor*."

"It may be as you say, *senorita*. There are few among us who are such fools as to despise such comfortable possessions as these you name, and I think Carlos shows strong good sense in liking them. Come; be more complaisant to me. I have my guitar here, and it has been said that I touch the strings well. Let us sit down and contemplate these rains, and sing of the glory of the Cid."

"A truce to badinage, *senor capitano*. I ask you again if you will set me at liberty?"

"I can not."

"And why?"

"Since you will have it, look at this order, and tell me if you think I am at liberty, as a soldier, to disobey it."

He placed an open paper in her hand, which she read aloud. This is the translation.

"MONTEBEY ——— —, ———.

"Captain Valdez Marco is ordered to seize and hold as a prisoner the Senora Zada del Solida of the San Antonio district, suspected of treachery to the Republic. AMPUDIA."

Zada, thoroughly enraged, tore the paper into pieces, and scattered the fragments to the winds, while Marco looked on laughingly.

"Very good; now shall I bring the guitar, *senorita*?"

"You would do well to be careful before you drive me to despair, *senor*. What does General Ampudia know against me, and why does he make war upon helpless women? I

am the more astonished that a man with your reputation for gallantry should lend himself to such a barbarous scheme."

"You are very hard upon a soldier," he expostulated. "Look you; I am a man of honor, and promised to keep you safe in the absence of Carlos. When he returns, I shall claim back my word, and after that I will have nothing to do with it. I am not a woman's jailer, I thank the saints."

"Let me escape!" she cried, eagerly.

"How could you escape in this pathless chaparral, *señorita*? It is miles from any part of the prairie, and the wood is infested with jaguars. I tell you that even I could not get out of it without a guide, and this is the fourth time I have been here. Let me assure you that I feel as deeply as you do the baseness of the plan which makes war upon women, and in reality have had nothing to do with it, although it was done under the orders of Anquiza. It was one of Mendoza's guerrillas who lassoed your horse, and brought you here, and by his orders, not mine."

"I believe you, *señor*," admitted the girl, "and what I have said against you, I now withdraw. I am sorry that it is out of your power to aid me, for there might come a time when even a weak woman might be of service to you."

"*Señor Capitano*!" cried one of the men. "What is the hound doing?"

The captain turned, and saw a large Spanish bloodhound, his own property, and of a peerless strain, lying at his length upon the wall, looking down with glowing eyes at something in the bushes below him. Sparks of fire seemed to flash from his eyes, and he was drawing himself slowly forward as if to meet some unknown enemy. While they gazed, there came a scuffling, confused sound in the bushes below, and a light, agile body was launched into the air, darting out toward the dog. They all saw the yellow sides, the black rings, and the long feline tail, and knew the dreaded enemy of the Texan jungles, the jaguar. In an instant the dog bounded forward, and the two seemed to lock in mid air, and came down upon the wall with a crash, and a terrible combat commenced for life or death.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEARFUL STRUGGLE.

THE shrill scream of the jaguar, and the deep, hoarse, growl of the dog, burst upon the air at the same moment, and then nothing was heard save a confused, scuffling, hurrying sound amid the creeping vines, mingled with a horrible panting, as the strong brutes strained for the mastery. The dog had set his teeth firmly in the loose skin upon the neck of the jaguar, but that very tenacity of grip cost him dear. For, while the jaguar had not the use of his teeth, his terrible claws were busy, and Zida, looking on spell-bound, saw the brave dog literally torn limb from limb, before her very eyes.

"My rifle, Pedrillo!" shouted Captain Marco. "Demons! Why don't you hurry?"

"Pedrillo" was hurrying, but not after a rifle. The moment the scream of the jaguar burst upon his ears, there was what 'Mark Twain' calls "a vacancy in the atmosphere where he had stood," and he precipitated himself over the wall, with a bound which would have been creditable to an acrobat. As the captain turned, he had only a vanishing view of the lancer uniform, as Pedrillo went over the wall.

Pedrillo had comrades who desired to share his danger, whatever it might be, and with startling unanimity, they followed him. These men could hardly be said to desert their captain; they supposed that he would profit by their good example, and follow them over the wall, not for a moment contemplating that he would remain to face the infuriated animal, now engaged in dissecting the unfortunate bloodhound. But Captain Valdez Marco was made of different clay from his men, and, with a hearty curse at their cowardice, he bounded back into the building, dragging Zida with him, and took up his rifle, which was leaning against the wall.

"What are you going to do, señor?" cried the girl

"Stay here; surely we can defend ourselves better here than outside."

"I am not a man to die like a rat in a trap," excitedly protested Valdez Marco. "Oh, what magnificent soldiers I have, and how I love them!"

He rushed out into the open air, with his rifle firmly grasped, and saw the jaguar licking up the blood of the dead hound, with an air of infinite relish. The moment he saw the captain, he desisted, and began to draw himself along the earth toward his enemy, the red tongue lolling from his mouth, and his eyes shining like stars in the night. Captain Marco had drawn his sword, and laid it up on the earth beside him, and, kneeling upon one knee, he took a steady aim at the jaguar. As he did so he heard a second fierce cry, and the mate of their terrible enemy leaped upon the wall, and stood there in majestic silence, her tail waving from side to side, after the manner of the feline race. Zada uttered a cry of alarm, and Marco discharged his rifle with good effect, bringing the jaguar to the earth with a broken shoulder. A second report followed, and turning quickly Marco saw Zada standing in the doorway of the ruin, a rifle smoking in her grasp.

"Back, for your life!" she called; "here comes his mate."

But, there was no time for retreat, for the body of the female jaguar was already in the air, leaping down to avenge her slaughtered mate, who now lay silent, for the bullet of Zada had pierced his brain. Marco grasped his sword while still kneeling, and waited for the rush of the beast. His last bound had brought him within six feet of the gallant young captain, and there she lay, prone upon the earth, her eyes seeming to look for some sign of shrinking in those of the Mexican. But those bold black eyes met hers without a quiver, and his nervous right hand firmly held the sword, which he well knew how to use. By a quick movement of the shoulder, he had thrown his scap over his left arm, which it completely covered. Zada felt a thrill of admiration for this man, and thought with pride that he was like her father, a pure Spaniard.

The jaguar seemed puzzled. She was uneasy before the

steady stare of those burning eyes, and turned her head from side to side. There is undoubted truth in the statement that no beast of prey can stand the unwavering stare of a fearless human eye.

The jaguar turned her head, and in doing so, caught sight of her mate, silent and bloody. Instantly the prehensile claws were seen to gather on the earth, and the monster crouched for her spring. Zada, who had now reloaded her rifle, ran to one side, and took a snap-shot at the crouching beast, and succeeded in sending a bullet through her body. It was a wound which would have been fatal in ten minutes, but which stung her to madness; the eye of the captain had lost its effect upon her. With a shrill cry of pain, she made her leap, and the captain thrust out his arm, for her to seize in her teeth. The strong jaws closed upon the arm, covered by the scrape, with such desperate force that the bones seemed to crack beneath them; but, careless of the pain, the gallant young man plunged his sword to the hilt in the broad breast of the jaguar, piercing her to the heart.

"Well done, capitano, well done!" cried Zada. "Give me your hand, and tell me that whatever happens, you will never be my enemy for you are a brave man."

The captain had withdrawn his sword from the wound, and was wiping away the blood with a bunch of grass.

"I am not insensible to the compliment, senorita. Indeed, I am deeply grateful, and will try to merit the title of friend. As for being your enemy—great Heaven, run! For your life."

He whirled suddenly, with the sword in his hand, and the next moment he was prostrated by the rush of a hairy body, and was brought to the earth, completely smothered. A third jaguar, nearly as large as the others, had crept over the wall, and attacked them; while a fourth was peeping over the wall, her graceful head turned upon one side, as if meditating whom to attack.

Captain Marco lay silent, his new enemy standing above him threateningly, and Zada uttered a wild scream.

"This way, lady!" cried a well known voice. "Run to me, and trust me for the rest."

Zada turned, and as she did so the jaguar abandoned the senseless form of Marco, and made after the girl, clearing the ground in long leaps. But, there came a rush of feet, and Zebra Zack leaped in between the jaguar and his destined prey. Zada had fallen on her knees, her dark hair flowing back in wild confusion from her marble forehead, her hands clasped, and her eyes fixed upon the man who had come to save her life.

"Zack!" she cried.

"That's me, girl; don't you stir, and let me show the captain how to fix a jaguar."

"There are two," replied the girl.

"I know it; oh, I've fought jaguars before, bless you, and I know how it is done. Run back out of range, for he is going to spring. Lord, what a cussed nest of the critters you struck."

Zada sprung to her feet, and ran back a dozen paces. She saw Zack standing there, a smile upon his lips, and his rifle at his shoulder, facing the jaguar. The next moment the beautiful body was in the air, the rifle rose suddenly, and as the animal seemed to hang suspended in the air, the marksman fired as coolly as if he had been shooting a pigeon from a trap. The animal dropped like a stone, dead before it touched the ground.

"Where is the rest of the family?" said Zack, laughing. "Oh; here she comes, raging wild, and I feel obliged to trouble myself with her, much against my will."

The last jaguar was coming on with long leaps in the direction of the daring ranger.

"Oh, go away!" he shouted, drawing his pistols. "Why will you force your company upon a man who despises you. Must I wipe out the whole family in this way?"

He turned to Zada who still stood near him, while the jaguar had stopped to sniff at the body of the first animal which had fallen.

"You are a cool shot, little girl, and I want you to do for this jaguar yourself. Will you try it?"

"I could not; I only fired to save the life of the captain."

"Don't forget Harry Bliss, my girl. I'll allow that the captain is a brave young fellow, but you see Harry has the

first chance. I saw Harry—but excuse me. This last critter demands attention at my hands.”

He raised his weapons as he spoke, and took a step in advance. The last of the tigers was within three rods, coming on with long, vicious leaps, snarling fiercely. Zebra seemed to change his mind, and, dropping the pistols, he drew his knife instead and held it above his head. The brute sprung, and Zebra leaped nimbly to one side, and brought the knife down as the jaguar passed. Zada, watching him closely, thought that the knife had not touched the jaguar, and she turned to fly, when a laugh from Zack called her back. She saw the beautiful body of the “Texan tiger” lying at his feet, apparently without a wound.

“What is it; how was he slain?” she asked, advancing quickly.

Zack turned over the yet warm and quivering body with his foot, and she saw the hilt of a bowie standing out between the shoulders, where it had been firmly planted by the quick hand of the hunter.

“Old Tennessee never fails,” explained Zack. “I learned that stroke from the best man who ever trod the green prairie, Dave Crockett of Tennessee.”

“Did you know Crockett, Zack?”

“Know him! Know old Dave, the great-hearted, true-hearted man who gave his life for Texas, within the bloody walls of the Alamo! Girl, I knew that man better than most people on the earth, and I loved him. Rude of speech, ready of hand, a dead shot, a mighty hunter, and a loving friend. And, when I think of him lying in his blood, with his enemies piled thick about him; and when I remember that there live men who were base enough to trample on the face of that old hero, it drives me half mad. May my arm wither to the shoulder on the day when I forget or forgive.”

“I have heard of Crockett from Mexicans who were at the Alamo,” said the girl, “and they told me how he fought, and how the men went down before the sweep of his long arm. And he was not a Texan, either; he only fought for men struggling to be free.”

“And Bowie was there, too, and taught them how a man can be who does not know the name of fear. Six men in

Santa Anna's army insulted my dead friends. Five of those men still live but I am on their track."

"Why do you wait, Zack? The soldiers will come back in a moment, and then there will be no chance of escape."

"I don't reckon them thieves will come back while there is a chance of a jaguar anywhere in Texas. Only think of it, girl; fifty strong men, with weapons in their hands, running from a jaguar! It is enough to make any man cuss his country and quit. I don't go out of this until I see that yonder brave young man is all right."

He ran to the place where Marco lay, lifted his head and looked into his face.

"He is only stunned, after all, and will come 'round in five minutes. I reckon we may as well put out."

"Is Harry here?" asked Zada, blushing.

"I judge not; do I look like a man fool enough to bring a lover on a scout? No; when it comes to the tight grip of a desperate fight, I'll let Harry Bliss loose against any man in Texas; but he ain't to be trusted here."

"I am afraid that the men will come back," replied Zada, nervously. "Let us go quickly."

By way of answer the air was filled with the yells of jaguars, so loud, fierce and perfect, that Zada uttered a scream of alarm.

"Shut up, girl," said Zack. "It is old Tennessee making all that noise, and I don't think any of them have got the pluck to come back and face the music. Ha; they are coming, and a-horseback, too."

He caught Zada about the waist and darted suddenly back to the cover. He was just in time, for, a moment later, Carlos Mendoza dashed in at the open gate of the city, at the head of thirty horsemen.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPED.

CRIES of astonishment, mingled with those of alarm, burst from the throats of the Mexicans, at this unlooked for spectacle. Malle, the half-breed, who followed Carlos, leaped from his saddle with an ax in his hand, and approached the first jaguar.

"Per dies!" he cried. "They are all dead, Senor Mendoza."

"Dead!"

"Si, senor; and only look. There lies Captain Marco with blood upon his face. Is he dead, too?"

Carlos sprung from the saddle and ran to the side of the captain, who at this moment stirred slightly. Mendoza took out his flask, and wet the lips of his superior with brandy, and forced a little between his set teeth. He spat it out instantly, and sat up.

"A curse upon all cowards!" he cried, starting to his feet. "Where is my sword? I will die fighting for her sake."

"For whose sake, Marco; what does all this mean?"

The captain stared stupidly about him, evidently surprised at the number of jaguars within the inclosure. He had been knocked senseless by the rush of the third, and it took him utterly by surprise.

"There are four of them," he shouted. "I killed two, but who killed the others?"

"Your men, probably."

"My men; ah, the ladrones! They flew over the wall like birds, and I have not seen one of them since. But, where is the lady?"

"Whom do you mean?" replied Carlos, turning pale.

"Who should I mean but Zada del Solida. She was here with me, and a bullet from her rifle is in both the jaguars we killed. It seems as if the whole brood of the jaguars in

this chaparral came at us at once. There is Pedrillo, thank Heaven; ah, cowardly ladrone!"

The orderly, who had set so good an example to his comrades, now made his appearance, his teeth chattering with terror. He appeared somewhat surprised to see his captain living, and advanced with a hesitating step, while Marco coolly took off his sword-belt, and fastened a grip like that of a vise upon the shoulder of the coward.

"And so you ran, my friend Pedrillo," he said in the smooth, easy tone which his orderly particularly disliked to hear. "So you took it upon yourself to decamp, just at the moment when I needed you most."

"Pardon, capitano, pardon."

"You ran; you, a soldier of the lancers. You ran, and your worthy companions ran off after you, like sheep following a leader. Wait until I give you your pay."

The sword-belt rose into the air, and descended with a whistling sound upon the shoulders of the lancer. He stood like a dog under the lash, crouching and venomous, begging for mercy at every stroke. Marco lashed him until his arm was tired, and then hurled him away.

"I degrade you to the ranks," now declared the captain, "although it is hard to degrade you in such a company as this. At least, you will not get as much pay."

"If you can spare a moment from this pleasant employment, Captain Marco, I should be glad if you would tell me what you have done with Zida," Mendoza suggested, rather coldly.

"How do I know?" answered the captain, angrily. "I would give a thousand doubloons to hear that she had escaped, and reached her father's hacienda in safety."

"You are very friendly," hissed Carlos. "Have you forgotten the orders of Ampudia?"

"I am not likely to forget them, but even Ampudia could not ask me to know any thing about events which occurred while I lay senseless upon the earth. I tell you that she vanished after I was knocked down."

The bugle sounded, and the fifty deserters began to stack in, one by one, looking crestfallen enough. The "assembly" was followed by "boots and saddle," and the force was

mounted, looking warlike enough in their gay uniforms, with the lances in their hands. But they were a sorry crew for all that. Captain Marco reined in his horse in front of them, and gave them the most terrible tongue-lashing which any body of men ever received.

"Enough of this," commanded Mendoza. "I wish to ask these men a few questions."

"To your station, Lieutenant Mendoza!" cried Marco. "I command this band of heroes for the present, and when I have finished, I will give you an opportunity to speak."

"But the girl will escape, and if she does, it will be your fault, sir. I shall report your neglect of duty to General Ampudia."

"If you do, I shall feel called upon to ask you to take a walk with me, and bring your sword with you. I have now said all I care to say to these cowards, who have been with you so long that they have become infected, as some of them used to show a little pluck. Ask your questions, Lieutenant Mendoza."

Carlos rode out and inquired if any of the men had seen Zada. But they had been so busy in securing their own safety, that they had thought of nothing else.

"*Make Godena!*" cried Mendoza. "You are a scout, and can find this trail. The rest of you stand back and let him work."

Malie at once advanced, and asked the captain where Zada had been standing when he was struck down. He pointed out the spot, and the half-breed stooped and quickly found the marks of the slender foot of the girl upon the earth, and followed the course she had taken when called by Zebra Zick. When he came to the place where the ranger had stood, he stopped, studied the marks on the earth for a moment, and then stood up with a low cry of surprise.

"Zebra Zick has been here, master," he cried. "The senora has gone with him."

All started back in terror, for such was the power the name of Zebra Zick exerted that every Mexican along that border dreaded him.

"Will you give the orders, Captain Marco?" said the lieutenant. "I prefer to have them come from you."

"I give you twenty-five men of your own choosing, lieutenant," replied the captain. "As for me, I cannot bring myself to persecute this beautiful girl. Follow her yourself, and remember that Zebra Zack is a gallant man, and as such, you must fear him. I will have nothing to do with it."

Mendoza called out twenty-five of his best men, and with Malle in advance, they began to follow the trail, each with a certain sinking at the pit of the stomach, as they thought that so good a shot as Zebra might be aiming at them at any moment.

"Take Pedrillo with you," ordered Marco. "He is a fine fellow to lead—a retreat."

"Excuse me," plead Pedrillo. "My place is by my captain."

"You are no longer my orderly, and I detail you to join the expedition of Lieutenant Mendoza. You will be an excellent fellow, as I said. In advancing, you must be sure and bring up the rear, so that in case of retreat you may take the lead."

Pedrillo followed the party reluctantly enough. By this time Malle was some yards in advance, and had nearly reached the cactus, when a stream of fire leaped from the bushes, and the half-breed, shot through the heart, fell dead. The Mexicans at once hugged the earth, and crawled like serpents to be out of reach of the shots, while Pedrillo sustained the high opinion of his captain by being the first to gain the shelter of a rock, where he lay glued to the earth, without the slightest desire to move. The merry laugh of Captain Marco rung out as he witnessed the sudden flight of his men, and he called to the rest.

"Have you pluck enough to follow me, or must I go lone?"

Ten men at once sprung to the front, men who were brave enough by nature, but who had been infected by the cowardice of their comrades.

"Enough, my men," cried Marco. "I hoped that some among you were brave enough, if only decently led. Come on, then. Scatter to the right and left, every man with his pistols ready, and surround this growth of cactus. The man who shot Malle Godena shall not escape."

The cowards who had fled, and those who remained behind, somewhat encouraged by the gallantry of the rest, began to look to their weapons, and prepared to follow. A cordon was drawn about the growth of cactus, so closely that there seemed no hope of escape. The body of Mallo Gaden lay upon the sod, his face upward, and his blood soaking into the earth; and a fierce thirst for vengeance fired every heart. The cactus was not stirred, and they knew not what the bold ranger was doing, but they felt that he would fight to the death.

"Not a shot now!" shouted Marco. "You must not endanger the life of this brave girl. Advance at the 'double!'"

Every man sprung to his feet, and they rushed forward at the double. Not a shot was fired, and they began to hew a path through the strong plants with their swords. A moment more, and they met in the center of the thicket, above the concealed stone which covered the flight of their enemies. Marco, standing directly above it, stamped angrily upon the earth, which gave back a hollow sound.

"Do you hear that?" he cried, beginning to hurl away the leaves and earth with the blade of his saber. "It is all right; there is a door here."

The men seconded him bravely, and the stone was soon laid bare. By the use of heavy knives and props they managed to raise the stone, revealing the steps. But the passage was dark as night, and even Marco recoiled.

"Captain," said one of the men, who had lived for many years among the tribes. "I think that I can trap these birds, without going into that den."

"What do you mean?"

"You know that I have lived among the Indians. They have their traditions, and among others, I have heard them say that the Lipans were the guardians of the cavern in which dwelt the war god. If all the stories they have told me are true, and I do not doubt it in the least, we are rich men if we can enter that cave. But the tradition runs that there is an entrance on the east side of the chaparral, known only to the chief of the Lipans, the secret of which descends to his children alone. I know where this entrance lies,

within a few hundred yards, and I propose that you send a party to lie in wait until they come out."

"Why not get torches and follow them at once?"

"Because there are secret doors which we would not find, and could not open if we chanced to light upon them, and they will be out on the other side, and far away over the plain, long before we could break through."

"You hear what this man says, Mendoza," said Marco. "I do not know him very well, and leave it to you to say whether his story is entitled to credence or not."

"I believe him," replied Mendoza, briefly.

"Very well; do you know any path by which you can get to the east side of the chaparral quickly?"

"I can be there in half an hour."

"Take as many of the lancers as you need, and go at once. My credit is concerned in the success of this expedition, for while I object to war against women, my objections do not extend to chasing this infernal scent, Zebra Zack."

The lancers chosen by Carlos, twenty in number, were quickly in the saddle, under the leadership of the man Gomez, who undertook to guide them to the spot where the ambush was to be set. They moved away rapidly through the bushes, leaving the captain staring down into the opening in the earth, which led to the chamber of the Mexican god of war.

After Zack had fired the shot which brought down the half-breed, Malle Godena, the Lipan sprang up beside him, and pointed to the opening in the earth. Zack caught Zeda about the waist and descended quickly, and the Lipan moved the stone back into its place, taking care that the accumulation of dust and leaves should remain upon the top. This done, he spoke to Zack.

"The white girl must not know the secrets which you have learned from me. Her eyes must be blinded, and you can lead her by the hand."

"Are you willing, senora?" asked the ranger.

"Certainly; here is a handkerchief."

She took from her pocket a heavy handkerchief which

Zack quickly formed into a bandage and passed over her eyes, completely blinding her. Then, taking her hand, he gave the lighted lantern into the hands of the chief, who at once took the advance, opening and closing the doors as he went, with the greatest care. They made all possible speed, and yet nearly an hour had passed when the chief raised the last stone, and stepped out into the light. After he had closed the stone, and carefully replaced the leaves and dust upon it, he parted the tangled growth for Zada to pass through, and Zack led her out.

"Let the white maiden have light," he said, waving his hand. Zack at once removed the bandage, and Zada opened her eyes.

"Where are we now?" she asked, looking about her in wonder.

"On the east side of the chaparral," replied Zack. "The chief has taken you safe through, although he has followed a strange path. Wait a moment."

He thrust his hand into a pocket of his hunting shirt, and took out a small piece of parchment inclosed in leathern covers. Upon this, written in black ink, were six names. Two of these had been erased by drawing a red lead pencil through them, and the third was now marked out by the same means.

"Malle Godena!" said Zack. "There are only three of them now."

He replaced the book, and at once led the way, followed closely by the chief and Zada. After a short walk they reached the horses which they had tied among the bushes.

"All safe, chief?" demanded Zack. "No one has been here."

The chief looked about him suspiciously, and at once mounted, seizing the lance which he had thrust into the earth by the side of his horse.

"You will have to ride with me, senora," remarked Zack, as he led the Zebra forward. "You understand how to ride on a pillion, no doubt, but I have none."

"I shall do well enough. Mount at once, senor, for I am anxious to be off."

Zack sprung into the saddle immediately, and extended his

foot and hand to assist the girl in mounting. The chief was looking at them curiously, and the hands of the ranger were fully occupied when savage shouts were heard, and the uniforms of the lancers could be seen as they dashed in.

"Away, chief!" shouted Zack, who was already hampered by half a dozen clinging forms. "Save yourself if you can, and remember that Harry Bliss will help you."

"Where?"

"At the Hacienda del Solida! Away!"

The chief tugged at his rein, and headed his mustang at the path, which was occupied by three of the lancers. Shaking his long lance in the air, he thrust it through the body of the foremost, and without attempting to remove it he swung his hatchet above his head, and with a thrilling war-cry darted at the others. The first went down cloven to the shoulders, and the other only saved his life by flinging himself out of the saddle into a thick mesquit bush, which lacerated his flesh fearfully. The chief turned again, and seemed about to rush to the aid of his white friend, but Zack shouted to him to fly.

"I will come again, Long Beard," he cried. "Cecileto, the Lipan, never deserts a friend."

He was gone even as he spoke, followed by a useless shower of bullets. A shrill scream of defiance came back, and the chief was seen no more. By this time Zebra Zack had been dragged out of the saddle, and stood with his arms tightly bound, and two sabers at his throat, while in front of him stood Carlos Mendoza, looking at him with a lurid smile.

"You and I meet once more," he said, "when no mad girl can come between me and vengeance. Do you know that I am about to kill you?"

"Why not?" was the reply. "I would have done as much for you, if I could have met you with weapons in your hands."

"Carlos," cried Zada, "you could not be such a coward. Dare to do it, and I will post you from Monterey to Mexico, and your comrades will spit in your face wherever they meet you."

"Mexicans think they have done a holy duty when they

"I've rid the earth of an accursed Tejano," growled the Mexican. "No; this time he shall not escape me."

"Wait a moment, lieutenant," called the man, Gomez. "Do you remember that I told you of the wealth said to be contained in the vault of the Mexican war-god?"

"Yes."

"Then do not kill the goose which lays the golden egg. Don't you know that this Tejano was with the chief in this secret place? Hence he must know the secret."

"You are right, Gomez, and I thank you. Demonicus! What a fool I would have been to kill him before he told me how to enter this rich treasure-chamber. You have heard what has been said, Senor Tejano, and understand what I want. Show us at once the secret way to the treasure-chamber."

Zack uttered a low, bitter laugh.

"You will not know this from me, amigo. I do know the secret, and in that lies my safety, for I am the only one, next to the Lipan chief, who could guide you where you wish to go."

"And you will guide us?"

"No; for the moment you had set your foot in the treasure chamber you would murder me in cold blood. Take me to the captain, and perhaps I may be more ready to speak than now."

"It is useless to waste time with him," said Carlos, drawing a pistol. "Stand aside, Zada; why do you come between us?"

"And you have dared to speak of love to me, Carlos Mendoza!" she exclaimed, standing between him and his victim. "You, who would murder this brave man!"

"Stand aside, or I will fire."

"Fire, if you wish. You can only kill him after you have killed me."

"That won't do, lieutenant;" expostulated Gomez. "You must not kill him until we have done our best to get him to reveal the secret."

"But he is obstinate; he will trick us in the end."

"No fear of that; I will answer for it that he does not escape."

"You are all against me, and you little know this devil or you would not give him a moment of life. Have it your own way, since you insist upon it. Tie him on his horse and let us return to camp."

Half a dozen men seized the prisoner, and placed him on his horse. His feet were linked together under the animal, and two ropes were passed about his body, one made fast to the pommel of the horseman in front, and the other in the hand of the man in his rear. Next to him rode Zada with Mendoza close beside her; and the remainder of the party brought up the rear.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TEXAN'S SWOOP.

THE Hacienda del Solida was a huge stone building, looking like one of the feudal castles of the old days. Its walls were of great height, and thick enough to withstand an attack from any thing except siege artillery. It stood near the bank of the river, in a bend of the stream, the water washing the heavy walls upon three sides. The only place whence it could be assailed was in the front, and this was defended by an eighteen foot wall of double thickness, and by a deep ditch and drawbridge which crossed the front. Indeed, the hacienda was one of the few buildings which had escaped the ravages of time, and had been built as an advance defense post of the conquering Spaniards.

The hacienda proper stood within these heavy walls, and was also built of rough hewn stone. Its doors and windows were so arranged that, at a moment's notice, they could be crossed and recrossed by iron gratings, set into the stonework of the walls.

The rangers were encamped upon the level plain in front of the hacienda. It was late in the afternoon, and they were enjoying themselves to the full. Some were shooting at targets, exhibiting wonderful skill; others playing at cards,

leaping, wrestling, and exhibiting their horsemanship. The jolly alcalde had taken possession of a little rising ground, and was holding a wrestling tournament, defying the rangers one after another. Man after man rolled down the slope, the conqueror crowing and flapping his arms like wings every time a man went down.

"Whar's thet boy of mine?" shouted Old Pap; "he's a dignified cuss, he is, and he don't dare to tackle the old man. Cuck-a-doodle, doo! Harry, my son, come and make the acquaintance of the grass of the prary. Come, and let me lay you down, like a bedbug on a pillow, or a tarantula on a Greaser. Oh, come; do come. I hunger and thirst arter you, my only son."

"Try him on, Harry," proposed one of the men. "He is getting so brassy that there will be no living with him, unless you put him on his back."

"Don't flunk, Harry; be a man, and try it. I don't suppose you kin begin to wrastle down this old prairie Roarer, but you kin try, and you fall in a noble cause."

Harry laughed and jumped on the rising ground. Father and son met and grappled, and a battle royal began for the possession of the hillock. The alcalde was a tough old wrestler, but he depended mainly upon his giant strength, and Harry upon his skill. All other sports ceased, and the men flocked about them, cheering and betting. Up and down the trampled sod, feinting first with the right foot, and then with the left, trying every means and artifice in the game, they struggled. The quick panting told that both were losing breath, when Harry made a quick movement, and got a "grapevine twist" upon the alcalde. He tottered, and fell, amid the cheering of the men.

"This is an ungrateful world," said the alcalde, rising, and brushing the dirt from his clothing. "I raise a boy; I do all I can to make a man of him, but he turns on the old man, and puts him on his back. Harry, I am proud of you, the only man in Texas that kin put Pap Bliss on his back."

"Oh, pshaw!" cried a man who had been thrown. "Zack can put you down every time."

"Will you gamble on that, Frizzle?" roared the alcalde. "Will you risk fifty here that he kan put me down?"

"Yes; I'll go my hull pile on *him*."

They were about to bet, when the beat of hoofs was heard upon the prairie, and the Mexican servitors, who happened to be out upon the plain, came galloping in, wild with fear, spurring for their lives.

"Los Indios, los Indios!" they yelled.

"Hold on!" roared the alcalde, picking one of the men out of the saddle with a quick jerk. "See yer; I want you. What's this foolishness about Injins? Say!"

"They come, they come!" yelled the Mexicans. "We are all slain, scalped, unless we fly."

The alcalde turned his victim slowly, placed him in the proper position, and "raised" him by a single kick, which sent him forward like a stone hurled from a catapult. The next moment the rangers were in the saddle, and dashing out in the direction taken by the stockmen in their flight. As they crossed the first roll of the prairie, they saw a single Indian, bending forward in his saddle, and dashing furiously down upon them.

"If I did not already hate and despise the natyve Greaser, as the tarantula sed to the lively centipede, I would hate an' despise 'em now. One Injun, boys; by the livin' Lozies, only one, an' ef that was *one* of these blamed stockmen that was twenty."

"That man is not an enemy," decided Harry. "Would he ride down upon fifty rangers alone unless he was friendly?"

"Mebbe he thinks we ar' Greasers, and ef he does, how disapp'inted he will be."

"Hello!" cried one of the men. "I know that chap. It is Cocheto, the Lipan chief, a great friend of Zebra Zack. He ain't after any mischief, you kin bet."

"It is Cocheto!" exclaimed Harry. "What can he mean by riding in that way? Let us make haste and meet him."

They hurried their pace, and soon met upon the prairie. Cocheto reined in his steed, and met them with a graceful salute.

"Cocheto is welcome," replied Harry in Spanish, which the Indian spoke fluently. "Why does he come to the rangers?"

"Does my brother love Long Beard, the friend of the Lip-ans?" demanded the chief.

"Yes; what of him?"

"There are Mexican soldiers in El Chaparral del Norte. They have taken Long Beard, and the daughter of the good Mexican, Del Solida, and will kill one and dishonor the other. I have come to bid you fly to their aid."

"Will you go with us?"

"No; Cochoito has other work to do. In yonder chaparral lies a ruined city. It was once the pride of the Aztecs, but its glory has long since departed. I will tell you how to reach it from the west, if you will attend to my words."

He gave Harry the direction and landmarks, and waving his hand, he turned his horse's head and dashed away to the east.

"I understand this yer thing now," cried Old Pap Bliss. "The Mexicans want Texas back, and this yer force in the chaparral hez been sent to clear the road for them. What do you say, boys; shell we take a little ride?"

The men cheered lustily; they were only too glad of a chance for an affray of some kind. By this time Del Solida had joined them, and the party dashed away across the prairie in the direction of the chaparral. They rode hard, but it was nearly dark when the chaparral was reached.

"It ain't any kind of use to try any thing to-night, boys," declared Bliss. "Let's make a camp."

They chose a sheltered place in a sort of lay in the chaparral, picketed their horses and set guards.

"It won't be long before we hev a tussle with Santa Anna again, lads," was the alcalde's expressed opinion. "He ain't satisfied to let us go an' we've got to call on our big brother for help."

"The United States?" asked the hacendado.

"Yess; the eternal Yankee nation."

"But your big brother will swallow you, body and bones."

"Just what we want. It ain't any use fur sech a little feller to try to git along alone. Our big brother hez got to take us into his family, and it wouldn't s'prise me if he took New Mexico an' Californy with us."

"I believe that you are right, Colonel Bliss. It would be

better far for Texas, exposed as she is, to have such a powerful ally. For my part, I am a Texan, and will fight against Mexico for the rights of the Lone Star State."

"Bully for you, saynyor! I reckoned you was game, long ago. What's the matter out thar, boys?"

"Pete Fisher has been scouting, and he says there is about a hundred lancers over thar, comin' this way."

"Mount, boys," ordered Harry. "Mexican lancers on our ground, eh? I'll give them a lesson which they will not forget in a hurry."

The rangers sprung into their saddles, and waited in the cover of the woods. The regular beat of cavalry at a trot was now heard, and a gallant looking company appeared over a roll of the prairie.

"Rangers, advance!" cried Harry.

The motley troop rode out of the cover in full view of the astonished Mexicans. There was a halt, and a slight movement to the rear, for the Mexicans of Durango had proved the Texans at San Jacinto. The single word—"Tejano!" was hissed by a hundred lips, and there was a decided movement to the rear. The Texans swung out with wild yells, their ragged garments and greasy buck-skin contrasting strangely with those of the gaudily attired enemy. The officers in command of the Durango troops could be seen riding along the front, vociferating, cursing, and swearing at the top of their voices, striving to stop the retreat. But, when the Texans came near enough so that their enemies could catch the gleam of their deadly rifles, they could stand it no longer. They broke and fled into the chaparral at full speed, with the rangers close behind.

"Arter 'em," roared the alcalde. "Give 'em Banker Hill, *E pluribus go unum*, nixy cum arouse! Dig in your heels, an' git; civot an' cahoot, ye imps of the prairie! Send in your spur to the ring every time, and drive 'em to the devil. Yaw, hip; wa-hoot! Arter 'em, Harry! Ride hard, ye untamed sons of freedom."

With that wild troop behind them, the rangers plunged into the pathless forest before them. With whoop and yell the Texans rode after, and the gloomy recesses of the chaparral swallowed them up. Many a gay bird was plucked of his

feathers, many a proud head bent to the dust before the wild Texans, at the command of their young captain, reined in their panting steeds upon the rim of the circle about the ruined city.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNTAMED PRISONER.

THE road by which the party which had effected the capture of the daring ranger returned to the lost city was a rude one, and after a rough ride of half an hour, they filed into the silent streets, where they were met by their companions, who shouted themselves hoarse over the success of their companions. Only one man did not seem pleased, and that man was Captain Marco.

"I give you my word of honor, Senora del Solida," he declared, "that I am sorry to see you return."

"I should not care so much for myself, knowing that you are able to protect me," replied Zada. "But, I do fear for Zebra Zick, who has fallen into the hands of his inveterate enemy."

"I have no sympathy with *him*," replied Marco, coldly. "Did he not kill Malle Godena?"

"Granted; but Malle Godena was one of his enemies, and would have done the same by him. I have some sympathy for the man who has just saved my life, if you have not."

"Saved your life; I do not understand you."

"It was done while you lay senseless. He killed the two jaguars with his own hand, and saved both you and me."

"I did not know it; but, considering the kind of men I have under me, you can see how little I can do for him. There is nothing on earth so villainous or bloodthirsty as a coward. But I will try what I can do."

"Captain Marco," said Carlos, advancing. "I bring you the man known as Zebra Zick, the murderer of Raphael

Gozo and Malle Godena, and I demand that he shall be shot."

"I have noticed a disposition on your part to command my troop for me, lieutenant. When I am ready to give orders, it is for you to obey. Place the prisoner in one of the strongest rooms in the ruin, and let him have a guard of five men. Let it be understood that if one of the men falls asleep, his comrades are expected to shoot him. Remove the prisoner."

"I will take charge of him," was the grim reply. "You shall see how well I can keep him."

"Wait; Corporal Gomez, you may take charge of the prisoner, and answer for his safety with your life."

He had chosen the right man; Corporal Gomez was the man who expected to find the treasure of the secret cave by means of the prisoner, and he would be careful of him.

"Why do you take him out of my hands?" cried Mendoza.

"Because you might make a mistake, and shoot him. Now, senora, according to the orders of Ampudia, I will take you in charge."

The sword of Mendoza leaped from its scabbard, and he advanced at once to attack his captain.

"By all the saints, Marco, you shall not take her out of my hands."

Marco drew a pistol with the utmost coolness, cocked and presented it. Mendoza leaped back with a furious oath.

"Consider yourself under arrest," said the captain. "You may retire at once, and I shall think how I may deal with you."

"I beg your pardon; I was too hasty," was Mendoza's humble apology.

"You are released from arrest. Senora; if you will come with me, I will speak with you alone."

The two withdrew to one side of the quadrangle.

"I tell you that a danger hangs over us of which even my lieutenant does not dream, lady. To-day Ampudia will be here with a large force, and if he finds you here, it will be impossible to say when you will escape. You know what Ampudia is, and how much mercy you may expect from him."

I do not believe, in all this, that Carlos is working for himself, as he is a mere tool of Ampudia."

"And why not, Captain Marco?" A hoarse voice spoke close to his ear.

Marco started back with a look of horror. Before him stood a coarse-looking man in a gaudy uniform, an angry look in his small fierce eyes.

"Colonel Ampudia!"

"At your service, captain. Senora del Solida, I am your very humble servant and slave."

Zala felt a wild throb of fear at her heart, as she looked at that brutal face.

"You may retire, Captain Marco," ordered the colonel, waving his hand.

"Do not leave me, captain," cried Zala. "I do not wish to hold any intercourse with this gentleman."

"Indeed? An old friend of your father's, and your devoted lover?"

"You had your answer to that, some time ago, Colonel Ampudia. I told you that I detested you for your conduct at the Alamo."

"And yet, before that you had promised to be my wife."

"Yes; but I hate a man who could insult the gallant dead, and murder those who could no longer fight. I told you never to speak to me again, if you will remember."

"Retire, Captain Marco!" shouted the colonel, furious at seeing the captain standing there, with a smile upon his handsome face. "I told you so, once before."

"One cannot disobey a lady," replied Marco. "Senora del Solida asked me to remain."

"And I command you to retire."

"I cannot obey you," was the calm response.

The colonel raised his hand, and for a moment seemed about to strike. Captain Marco, with one hand upon his sword-hilt, looked him quietly in the eye, but Ampudia knew well that if he struck, Marco would kill him where he stood.

"You are under arrest," said the colonel, lowering his hand.

Marco inclined his head without reply.

He was too good a soldier to refuse to obey the military orders of his superior officer, and yet he seemed half-inclined to do so. Half a dozen of the followers of Ampudia, under charge of an orderly, advanced at the signal of the colonel, and took charge of the captain.

"To whom am I to yield up my sword, Colonel Ampudia?" demanded Marco. "Remember who I am."

"Keep your sword, captain; keep your sword. I only wish to give you a lesson of obedience to the orders you receive."

"I understand the lesson, colonel. I am to stand idly by, while a lady of birth and beauty is insulted before my very eyes. I yield myself prisoner; but, understand me; I pawn my honor for the safety of this lady, and I will carry my complaint before Santa Anna himself, if any wrong is done her."

"Take him away!" commanded Ampudia, waving his hand. "I am strongly tempted to put it out of his power to complain to any one, by ordering out a firing party, and giving him a volley. Senora, why will you not look more kindly upon your devoted adorer?"

"You have said enough, Colonel Ampudia. I repeat what I said before, that your every word is an insult. As for this wretched cousin of mine, Carlos Mendoza, no words can describe my horror, at his baseness. Pretending to love me, he has only sought to betray me into your hands. Oh, that Harry Bliss and his rangers were here! Your feathers are somewhat rumpled, colonel; can it be that you have already met him?"

Ampudia hissed out a Spanish oath. He had met with Harry Bliss, and her shrewd guess drove him nearly mad. She laughed aloud as she noticed his discomfiture, and Marco, standing a short distance away, joined her heartily.

"You will go too far, my lady," hissed Ampudia. "What if I choose to treat you as a spy, taken in the act?"

"You *dare* not do it!" retorted the resolute girl.

Mendoza touched the colonel upon the shoulder, and whispered in his ear. His words were "we have taken Zebra Zack, and he is a dear friend of Harry Bliss, and came here to rescue her." Ampudia uttered a loud exclamation of de-

light, and ordered those who had Zack under guard to bring him out. The sturdy scout was led into the inclosure, bound and guarded, surrounded by a circle of lance points. Ampudia looked at him fixedly, with a tigerish gleam in his eyes.

"So, this is the scout of whom we have heard so much? Man, who are you, and why do you hate Mexico?"

"I do not hate Mexico," replied the scout, quietly.

"But you hate her people?"

"Some of them; you, among others."

"Ah; and why do you hate us?"

"Because all brave men hate cowards."

"Cowards?"

"What else are you? Even now you are threatening a weak girl, and no brave man would do *that*."

"Here is a paper which was taken from him," put in Mendoza. "It is a sort of black list, which he carried with him always."

Ampudia took the paper, and looked at it closely. It was a piece of parchment about the size of a sheet of letter paper. At the top of the sheet was written in a bold, flowing hand:

"I swear to avenge Crockett and Bowie upon the men who insulted them as they lay dead. Below are the names of those marked for vengeance.

"Luis Ampudia, Captain of Lancers.

"Raphael Gozo, Lieutenant.

"Carlos Mendoza, Lieutenant.

"Malle Godena, Meztlizo.

"Estevan Grillo, Sergeant.

"Pedro Diaz, Peon."

A red line had been drawn through the names of Gozo, Godena and Diaz. The scout looked on calmly while Ampudia read this singular sheet, standing at his ease, as if he had been in the midst of his own camp.

"An interesting production, truly. Am I to understand that these three men have been killed?"

"Yes," quickly answered Mendoza.

"And that he killed them?"

"He killed two of them, and I escaped from him in a wonderful manner."

"The girl saved *him*; he would have been killed but for her, and now he turns against her," and Zack's eyes glistened like burnished steel.

"You own that you killed Lieutenant Gozo?"

"Proud to say it, colonel. If I could only get a chance at you, my happiness would be complete."

"In other words, you are a murderer."

"Not a bit of it; I fought Gozo and Mendoza, my bowie against their swords, on foot. The natural meanness of the Greaser cropped out, and Mendoza ran, leaving me to take care of Gozo; I took care of him, as the red line will testify."

"Will some one bring a rope?" called out Ampudia, with a fierce smile. "A lariat will do if you have nothing better."

"Here is my lazo," answered one of the lancers, coming forward.

"Hang him!" said Ampudia, briefly. "I do not care to live with a sword hanging over my head."

The lancers seized upon the scout, and dragged him out of the inclosure. Not far from the gate, looming up above the chaparral, was a single large tree. About twenty feet from the earth, a strong limb grew out nearly at right angles. One of the Spanish Indians swiftly ascended the tree, and threw a lazo over this limb. A running noose was formed at one end, and the scout was placed upon the back of a horse, his hands bound, and a bandage over his eyes.

"Have you anything to say before you go?" demanded Ampudia. "You know something of the designs of the Texans, and can tell me what they mean to do."

"If I would! You waste time with me, Ampudia, and the sooner you end this, the better."

Ampudia raised his hand to give the signal, when wild yells arose on every side, and the men who held the end of the lazo dropped it, and ran for the ruins. Instantly Zebra Zack dug his heels into the sides of the horse, and shouted to him, and he was off like an arrow from a bow. The Mexican colonel fired once at him, but the wary scout ducked, and the shot passed harmlessly over his head, just as he plunged into the bushes. Up rose the Lipans on every side;

he was quickly set free; a heavy hatchet and knife was thrust into his hand, and then they charged the astonished Mexicans.

"Back to the ruins!" cried Ampudia. "They are on us in force."

Captain Marco, who had not been bound, drew his sword and rushed to the gateway. Thirty men, the bravest in the troop, stood by his side, and together they held the entrance against the advancing Lipans. It was a wild *mêlée*, a sea of tossing lances, waving plumes, and bright axes. The eyes of Zebra Zack had never left Ampudia, but he had gained a place of safety behind the wall, and in that secure position was shouting to his men to stand firm, and sweep the Lipans from before the walls.

"The coward is safe," hissed Zack. "Ah, Grillo; you are here, at any rate."

The words were addressed to a stout fellow who was among those who stood up with Marco. As the Lipans rushed down upon the brave band, Zack singled this man out and dashed at him. Eluding the thrust of his lance, he closed in and lifted the heavy ax above his head. There came a dull blow, and Grillo went down, cloven to the teeth. Four of the Black list had been rubbed out. Only Ampudia and Mendoza remained alive of the six who had insulted the dead lion.

Marco made a pass at the Lipan chief, which he avoided by swinging himself half out of the saddle, but a lance passed through the extended arm of the Spaniard, and the sword dropped from his hand. The hatchet of the Lipan glittered above his head, when a wild shout from Zebra arrested the blow.

"Strike not, Cochetto!" he cried. "Spare him, for he is a gallant man."

At this moment the sound of a bugle was heard, and the brilliant uniforms of the lancers gleamed amid the trees in the rear of the Indians. Zack, at a glance, comprehended that a great force of Mexicans had come upon them, and that it was useless for a hundred half-naked Indians to struggle against five times their number of well-armed foes. Cochetto saw it too, and shouted an order to his men in the Lipan

tongue. As if by magic, they scattered to the right and left, and in a moment not an Indian was in sight. They passed through the chaparral unknown to the Mexicans, and not five of them were overtaken in the pursuit. The lancers came back at the sound of the bugle, and fell into line in the great inclosure. Five hundred men, admirably mounted and equipped, they formed a noble looking force, and yet a hundred Texan rangers would have ridden against them, and scattered them like chaff before the wind.

"Well done, my braves of Durango!" cried Ampudia. "You came in an opportune moment for us."

"I have to report the escape of the prisoner," said Marco, advancing and saluting. The blood was dropping from his fingers as he spoke, for the lance had passed through his arm.

"You are under arrest, sir," said Ampudia, sharply.

"I again yield myself, colonel," replied Marco. "Under the circumstances, I thought it best that some one who could control the men should hold the outer gate."

"What do you mean by that?" was the angry reply.

"I mean just this: if some one had not held the Indians in check the succor of the Durango regiment would have come too late."

"You did a great deal, truly," sneered Ampudia.

"At least, I was not behind a wall!" retorted Marco, coolly. "I am under arrest again, but I must ask for a surgeon, as I am badly wounded in the sword arm."

There was a murmur among the new arrivals. It ill accorded with their notions of justice that a man who had been badly wounded in fighting *outside* the walls, should be placed under arrest by one who had sheltered his body within.

"It won't do, colonel," whispered Mendoza. "The Durango men like the fellow, and may make us trouble."

"You are released from arrest, Captain Marco," was Ampudia's response to this hint.

"I demand a court martial," exclaimed Marco. "I wish to see whether it is in the power of a colonel of cavalry to degrade a man of my rank without just cause."

"But I tell you that you are at liberty, as you have behaved so well in the late encounter."

"I refuse to accept liberty upon those terms," demanded

Marco. "If you chose to acknowledge, before the men in whose sight you have disgraced me, that you have been in the wrong, and that you had no good ground for the arrest, I will take my sword again."

"*Maldito!*" hissed Ampudia, in the ear of Carlos Mendoza. "What must I do?"

"I think you would do well to accept his terms," replied Carlos.

Ampudia raised his head, and looked down the line of the regiment. He saw open mutiny in half the faces there, and suppressed anger in others.

"I offer you my apologies, Captain Marco," he said, "and own that I was hasty in taking away your sword."

"Very good. I await your orders."

"Take command of your company after your wound has been dressed."

Marco saluted with his left hand, and turned into the ruins, followed by the surgeon. Ampudia now addressed the men.

"Troopers of Durango!" he cried. "The time has come when injured Mexico dares to assert her rights. Texas, the fairest star in our sky, has been wrested from us by treachery at a moment when we were not prepared to meet it. Mexico is now strong, strong enough to assert her rights, even though the United States should dare to give aid to Texas, as one of her States. But she dare not; she will crouch before the banner of Mexico, like a frightened hound before his master's whip. For some months our officers have been at work, stirring up those who are faithful to us, and preparing them for the signal of war. Some are up already, and from the forest and the chaparral wage war with our Texan foes. Rancan! Gozo was captain of a band, but he has fallen by the hand of that thrice accursed Texan, Zebra Zack, who has buried him to his death. It will not be long before the army of Mexico will pour like a torrent over the border, and Texas, with its Lone Star banner, will go down in a sea of blood. When the work is done not one among you but shall have an estate of his own, wrested from one of these Texan hounds."

Zack uttered a merry laugh.

"Have you ever heard the old adage, 'you should always catch a wolf before you skin him,' Colonel Ampudia?"

"Do you doubt that we shall beat these accursed Tejanos?" demanded Ampudia.

"I have no doubts upon the subject," was her scornful retort. "The Texans will administer a sound drubbing, every time you do not come upon them in the proportion of ten to one. How many men did they have at the Alamo? One hundred and fifty; and you were thirty or forty to one. How many did they have at Jacinto? And yet Santa Anna was beaten, captured, and his force surrendered."

"Be silent, traitress!"

"You speak falsely, and are deceiving these brave men. Soldiers of Durango, let me speak. You cannot conquer Texas, for the great United States stand ready to take up arms against you."

"Silence her accursed tongue, Mendoza!" cried Ampudia.

"Gentlemen," said Zada, laughing, "this man says he loves me to distraction, and I can well believe it. What do you think?"

"You must stop talking in that way, Zada," whispered Mendoza. "You don't know Ampudia, or what he might be tempted to do if you drive him too far."

"I care nothing for his threats," was her reply. "He shall not lead me blindfold to death while I have a tongue and know how to speak."

"There are such things as gags to be had," suggested Mendoza. "Remember, you were arrested as a spy."

"A mere subterfuge, as you well know."

"It will serve its purpose. You would do well to be silent, or you may peril other lives than your own."

At this moment a wild commotion was heard outside the ruins. The guards were evidently at a loss what to do, and a tremendous voice was heard bellowing out this classic defiance:

"Greasers, git! Git like the besom of destruction, and the devil's simoom in its wrathful fury. Dust, alsgutulate, travel, like the wind that blows, or as a coyote goes! Git ye, git ye, for Old Pap Bliss cometh!"

"Who is that?" demanded Ampudia.

Some of the guards attempted to stop the gate, but they were rudely thrust aside, and two men rode into the inclosure. The foremost was Old Pap Bliss, the alcalde, with a white flag in his hand, and a savage look in his eyes. Beside him rode Senor del Solida, in plain civilian dress.

CHAPTER XI.

A RUDE AMBASSADOR.

THE lancers retreated before the threatening arm and flashing eyes of the alcalde, as he pushed his way into the center of the ruin, holding his flag like a spear, and thrusting it rudely into the face of every Mexican who came too near.

"I arrive, like a bed-bug armed for war. Greasers, don't rouse my angry passions, or may I never see the back of my neck if I don't mount ye as a grass-hopper mounts a sweet potato vine. I'm the alcalde of the San Antonio, and I'm a rooster; you knowed Old Pap Bliss afore. Whar's the man that pretends to be chief cook of this yer band of heroes?"

Ampudia, always impudent when he thought he had the power, at once came forward.

"What do you mean by coming into my camp in this way, Sir Alcalde?"

"Now if this don't bang all the cussidness I ever experienced, shoot me fur a Greaser. Cheekin' it to me, a man that see the backs of this illustrious company, no longer ago than yisterday. See here? You hed a hundred men an' my boy Harry only hed fifty, but you run like a thief."

"Colonel!" expostulated Senor del Solida. "Sir Alcalde! Be careful what you say."

"Oh, don't ask me to speak soft and palavery to him, say-
nor. I kain't; tain't like a Texan to knuckle down afore
this kind of track. I'll hev to ask you to excuse me, fur I
kain't stand it. Didn't he run like a thief; say?"

"I have heard enough of this sort of talk," said Ampudia, hoarsely. "What do you want here?"

"Waal, the saynor hyar hez a trifle of bizzniss with you, and I cum along to see fair. I'll bottle up my wrath while he defines his position, but all the time I feel my wrath git-ting up like yeast bread by a hot stove. It would do my old heart good to let you hev *one*, smack on the bugle. It would really do me proud."

"You would do as well to bottle your wrath, my worthy alcalde. Now, Senor del Solida, may I ask your business here?"

"I have come to demand my daughter, who is a prisoner in your hands."

"To demand. It seems to me that less peremptory language on your part would be more suitable."

"We have not come to you cringing, Colonel Ampudia," replied Del Solida. "We are well aware that you have nearly six hundred men under your command, but we also know what kind of men they are, and how long they will stand before the riflemen of Texas. Before nightfall, we shall have one hundred and fifty Texans, armed to the teeth, and two hundred Lipan warriors. The leaders of the Texans will be Captain Harry Bliss, the alcalde, and Zebra Zack. The leader of the Indians is the chief Cochetto, and you can tell whether he is a brave man or not. In addition to this, I have armed fifty of my stockmen, and rancheros, and they will fight, to say the least, better than your men. I now repeat my demand for my daughter."

"Your daughter is a prisoner, senor."

"A prisoner! To whom, and under what charge?"

"She is a spy."

"Is there a war between Mexico and Texas, then?"

"There will always be war until Texas is again one of the Mexican States. Your daughter has been taken by my orders, and she will be held until I see fit to set her at liberty."

"You know what will follow if you refuse to let her go."

"I have no fear of the result, and to prove it, I am going to let you see your daughter. If you will step into yonder ruined building, you will find her."

Del Solida leaped from his horse and ran into the building.

where he was received by Zada with a cry of delight. At a signal from Ampudia, Mendoza drew near, and his commander whispered in his ear. He moved away slowly and spoke to some of the men, who at once took their stations before the door of the ruin, with lances in their hands.

"Now, Sir Alcalde," said Ampudia, "it is your turn. I ask you how you had the impudence to come into my camp in this insulting manner?"

"Don't, Greaser; don't!" retorted Pap Bliss. "You don't know how you hurt my feelin's when you speak in that ridiculous way. I'd hev you to know that Pap Bliss goes where he likes in Texas, and don't ask leave of any Greaser on top of the green aith. Besides, ain't I under a flag?"

"That for your flag?" replied Ampudia, snapping his fingers. "Remember that for the present at least, we are guerillas, and that we do not fight under the ordinary forms of war. We do not recognize your flag."

"You eternal sarpint!"

"Therefore if we see fit to make you prisoner, how are you to help yourself?"

"I ain't a durned fool, Cunnel Ampudia," was Old Pap's reply. "I knowed durned well yar wouldn't play fair, and I didn't put myself in your hands without seeing a road out of it. You don't valley the flag, then?"

"Not in the least."

"You ar' goin' ter take me a prisoner, eh?"

"Certainly."

"Now didn't I know it? Didn't I say to the boys, when I came away, you'd better keep them four Greaser officers mighty close, because like as not that cussid Ampudia will nab us."

"Four officers! What do you mean by that?"

"I s'pose you hev hed a heap to think of, and ain't looked over your men very close. Waal, read this yer letter."

He thrust his hand into his bosom, and drew out a paper, which he handed to the colonel. He opened it, and read:

"TO GENERAL AMPUDIA:

"This is to let you know that the Texans have taken us, and hold us hostages for the safe return of Senor Del Solida and the alcalde of San Antonio.

"Diego Alvarez, Captain.

"Manuel Flores, Captain.

"Juan Alvarado, Adjutant.

"Francisco Menez, Lieutenant."

The alcalde, with a grin of delight, watched the changing expression of the colonel's face as he read this letter.

"This is a base forgery!" he cried.

"You orter know, Ampudia. All I kin say is that the Capt'in Alvarez writ that letter, an' his kumrads signed it."

"Let them suffer for their folly, then; I won't let you go."

"It's all right, cunnel. I'm mighty sorry fur them young chaps, because the boys will hang them, sure. However, hyar is another letter; mebbe that will suit you better."

He gave another scrap of paper to Ampudia, who opened it quickly.

"MY DEAR UNCLE.

"I have been taken by the demon they call Zebra Zack. He holds me a prisoner, and swears that if the bearers of this flag do not come back safe, that he will hang me with his own hands.
FERNANDO AMPUDIA."

"I've heerd tell he was yer nephew, an' that you thought more of him than of a son," remarked the colonel. "Now I ruther like the boy myself, and I'd hev lated orfully to see Zebra walk inter him with a bowie, an' chop him inter fragments, ez a spider dissects the playful fly. But he'd do it; he's an or'nary cuss, an' he jest delights to carve a livin' Greaser."

"Do you tell me that this demon has taken my nephew, and means to murder him in cold blood?"

"His name is ag'in' him, too?" continued the alcalde in a meditative tone. "His name is Ampudia, and it beats all how Zack hates that name. He cusses and swears ef a man o much as speaks it in his presence. Yes, by thunder, that bar young major is in a mighty tight box."

"Away from the door!" cried Ampudia, waving his hand to the lancers. "I wish to speak with Senor del Solida."

The lancers moved away, and the senor came out, leading his daughter by the hand.

"You may leave the young lady within, senor," commanded Ampudia. "I do not intend to allow her to go. You know who I am, and what my station is in Mexico. I have

seen and loved your daughter, but she scorned me, and I determined to make you repent it. I am not so proud that I will refuse to take even an unwilling bride, and I propose to **make Zada my wife.**"

"I have heard of your insults to my child," replied Senor del Solida, drawing his sword. "You are my equal in birth, and I, villain though you are, I will meet you. Draw your sword and fight."

"I will not," said Ampudia, drawing back quickly. "I do **not fight with a prisoner.**"

"**Coward! Ladrone!**"

The sword was in the hand of Ampudia in an instant. He was not a coward, and the weapons clashed together, but in Del Solida he met a master of fence, who could have given him lessons in sword play. They had not made three *pas-es* when Ampudia saw his danger, and shouted to his lancers. They ran in to aid him, and Del Solida found himself surrounded by a forest of brown lances, pointed at his heart.

"Fly, Sir Alcalde," he cried. "Escape, while there is time, and carry the news to the camp."

"Hold on!" shouted the alcalde. "Let me whisper in the ear of these mean cussis. See hyar, Ampudia; d'ye mean to tell me that you won't do anything to save yer officers?"

"No; let them reap the harvest of their folly. As for you: **down with him, men.**"

But Old Pap was prepared for them, and before the lancers could close upon him, he had reined back his horse, a noble young mustang, and cleared the rude barrier before the gate in gallant style. A dozen shots were fired, but the gallant old man was already in the cover of the forest.

"Git, Jerusalem!" they heard him shout. "Lay down to it, as the peaceful nigger slumbers in the shadow of the fragrant thorn-bush. Show the darned Greasers your heels. I'll **come back, saynor; you bet all yer worth.**"

The sound died away in the distance, and all trace of the alcalde was lost. Ampudia was very angry, for he knew that the "Judge" was a fighting man, and that they would **hear from him soon.**

Captain Marco had been sitting like a statue upon his

mustang, while this was going on. He saw the senor surrounded by a circle of lances and his hand closed upon his sword-hilt with a tenacious grip. For a moment, it seemed as if he was about to fling himself upon his commander, but he restrained himself.

"Captain Valdez Marco," called out the senor, speaking from the midst of the lances as coolly as if he did not see them, "do you have any hand in this villainy?"

"I have been put under arrest once to-day for taking your daughter's part, and I am ready to accept the same fate again."

The captain rode out from the front of his command, and saluted his superior coldly.

"I think you are joking, colonel," he said. "You surely did not mean to take men prisoners who came to you under a flag."

Ampudia looked at the speaker, gnawing his livid lips.

"Do you rebel again, captain?"

"Not at all, colonel. I merely call your attention to the fact that some of your men have their lances pointed at the breast of Senor del Solida. What are you about there? Fall into line!"

The men started, and looked at Ampudia, who, after a moment's hesitation, repeated the order, and Del Solida remained alone, grasping his sword still.

"You were interrupted in your sword play, colonel," he said. "Perhaps you wish to finish."

"Not at all, not at all. You will at once retire into the ruins, for you are my prisoner."

"He is under a flag," persisted Marco.

"Captain Marco is also under arrest. Surrender your sword to Lieutenant Mendoza."

Marco drew his sword, and laid it across his knee, snapping it short at the hilt, and dashed the fragments into the face of Mendoza, as he approached. Then swinging himself out of the saddle, he took his place by the side of Del Solida.

"May my arm be palsied on the day when I lift a hand in such a cause as this!" he cried. "Senor del Solida, if you will come with me, I will show you your quarters."

They passed into the ruins, closely followed by the savage glances of Ampudia. He strode after them, accompanied by a guard, and gave orders that they should be separated.

"You shall not be allowed to plot treason together," he cried. "As for you, Zalia del Solida, I intend to make you my wife before the sun goes down."

"You shall see."

"Do you dare defy me?"

"Yes."

"My bride, or death," he cried, as he thrust her into a room by herself, while Del Solida and the captain were borne back by the lances of the guard.

"Death be it then!" she cried. "Soulless monster, death may be nearer to you than to me."

Even as she spoke the first gun was fired, and she knew that the Texans were on the march.

CHAPTER XII.

A DREADFUL PERIL.

THE Texans were indeed in the chaparral, but yet miles away.

Ampudia heard their distant signals, and knew that there was little time to lose, if he made a defense. If he could hold his ground for a few days even, the division of General Arista would be with him, and Texas at their mercy. For the advance of this force was only to pave the way for the Mexican army, eager to win back the lost State for Mexico. In all this, they forgot that Old Zack Taylor with two thousand men, was already in the State.

"Captain Marco," he said. "I have reconsidered my decision, and I again release you from arrest."

"I have broken my sword," was the reply of Marco. "Long live the Lone Star of Texas! long live the United States of America! If I ever draw the sword again, it will be upon that side."

"Traitor!"

"So be it. I have been insulted before my regiment, because I acted like a man of honor. I will not fight for you again."

"I give you an hour to think of it, captain. At the end of that time you will be taken out and shot, if you refuse to do your duty."

"Enough; the sooner you shoot me the better, for I will not fight for you."

"I give you an hour," was the fierce reply. "Padre Jose will come to you then, and give you a chance. If you refuse then, and if Zada del Solida also refuses to yield, Senor del Solida and yourself will die in company."

"I could not die in better company," replied Del Solida. "If you would do us all a favor, let the firing party be ordered out at once, for I very much fear that if you do not hasten them somewhat you will have other work for their rifles."

"Let the accursed Tejanos come if they dare! If they do, trust me, we will give a good account of them."

"They are on the march already, for as I came into this place I heard their rifle signals. I would give the balance of my life for the privilege of marching in their ranks, and striking for the cause of Texas."

"Remember, Zada del Solida," screamed the Mexican, livid with rage, "when the padre comes, if you are yet obstinate, both these men shall die."

Zada answered not a word, but her eloquent eyes, fixed upon the calm face of her father, read his thoughts. He would sooner die a thousand deaths than give her up to this dastard, and would meet his doom with a smile upon his face.

"You have no more to say, I hope," said Marco. "If I ever escape from you, and meet you again, even in a sanctuary, clinging to the altar, I will kill you."

Ampudia strode away without a word, for he heard voices calling him, and knew that they would not stand a moment, unless well led. He trusted somewhat to Carlos Mendoza, who was a good leader, when his forces outnumbered those of the enemy, as they did in the present instance.

"They are driving in the scouts already," announced Men-

doza, "and I can tell that they are not very far off. Demons! It looks as if we were in a trap."

"You surely do not think that one hundred Texans and twice as many Lipins and peons can drive out twice their number of trained soldiers?"

Mendoza shrugged his shoulders. He had but little faith in his men, knowing that they were arrant cowards, and would run upon the slightest provocation. Ampudia understood the gesture, and his own heart began to fail him.

"I wish I could see a way out of this," he remarked. "I would not stay here to meet these villains, but we might fall into an ambush and be cut off to a man. What plan would you advise?"

"We must defend the outer wall as long as our men will stand, and then retreat to the ruins. Some of these old gates are strong yet, and we ought to make a good defense. Stop! If the worst comes to the worst, I know a way of escape which will suit us admirably. You desire to take Zada with you when you go?"

"Certainly."

"Then send her to yonder hillock, under charge of a guard. Order him to stay there until we come to him."

Ampudia called out three men, who went into the ruin, and brought out Zada. They had their orders, and led her at once to the crest of the hillock, where Malle Godena went down.

"Caramba!" said one of the guards. "It looks as if Ampudia meant to run. Very good; we shall be with him at all events. The men will not stand ten minutes."

And indeed the braves of Durango did seem ill at ease. At every signal which went to show that the enemy were rapidly approaching, these warriors looked behind them for some avenue of escape. But, to their utter horror, the sounds they heard seemed to come from every part of the forest, and they were literally surrounded.

"Good faith, Matteo!" exclaimed one of the lancers. "We must fight all Texas, it seems. Would it not be better to yield at once, and save bloodshed?"

"Remember the Alamo!" cried Mendoza. "That was the battle-cry of the Texans at Jacinto, and that will be the bat-

tle-cry to-day. Either we must beat them, or we die by their weapons, for not one of us will be spared."

"The devil is not so black as he is painted," suggested Matteo. "They spared us at San Jacinto by hundreds and thousands, which is more than we would have done. For my part, I do not think these Texans are very bad men, after all."

"Silence!"

"But I believe it," whined Matteo. "I am a poor soldier and must go where I am ordered, but, for my part, I do not know what right we have in Texas. It is hard enough to live in Mexico, where we have an insurrection and change of government two or three times a year, without coming here to have a fight."

"If you say another word, my good friend, I will cleave you to the jaws."

Matteo was silent, but his words had borne fruit. Most of his comrades began to think that, after all, these Texans were fine fellows, and it was a pity to fight with them. Mendoza noted the mischief which had been done, and spoke hurriedly to Ampudia, who approached the soldier with a savage scowl upon his face.

"I am going to place your company at the main gate," he announced, "and I mean to watch you especially. You are a coward, and are trying to make the men as bad as yourself. If you attempt to run, the men on the right and left have orders to cut you down. What are you thinking of, men of Durango? Do you not know that there is no mercy for you, if you should be taken? Are you not aware that these Texans will not regard you as soldiers, but as guerrillas, and kill every man who yields? The Lipans are with them too, and you know what *they* are. Stand up like men, and we will send them howling back into the chaparral from whence they come, and old Mexico will be proud of her sons."

The men cheered feebly, but they had little stomach for the battle. Yet the colonel hoped that by sheer force of numbers, if by no other means, they might be able to beat down the assailing force, and drive them back into the woods. They had not long to wait, for already the advance

guard of the Texans could be heard breaking through the chaparral, and the shrill cries of the Lipans could be heard in the rear. They were savage at the thought that the descendants of Cortez had dared set foot in the ruined city of which they were so proud, and they feared that the sacred vault might be discovered. Their plans had long ago been laid, and when the troops had been placed in order of battle, Old Pap Bliss rode out in front of the ruins, and hailed them in a thundering voice.

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! All ye Greasers in thar, give ear to my song. The Texans ar' on the war-path, b'ilin' Lot fur war, and we want ye bad."

Ampudia at once mounted the walls, and asked his business.

"Oh pshaw, Ampudia; you know what we want, and what we want we ar' goin' to hev, now you bet yer life. We want ter know what you mean by bringin' men in battle array upon the sacred site of Texas. We fit you an' licked ye, fa'r and squar', an' we kain't hev ye hyar."

"Very well; we are willing to go away if you do not like it."

"You ar'! Waal, we ain't kzwite so willin'. You hev vintured inter the jaws of the Texan lion, an' he's got a grip on ye that he don't kulkete to loosen. We summon you to surrender in the name of the Lone Star Republic, and the President tharof, Old Sam Houston, tew wit. March out, stack yer shooters, an' you shall hev fa'r play every time."

"We will not surrender."

"You make me happy ez a clam. Boys, the Greasers want a fight, and they shall hev it, or my name ain't Old Pap Bliss. Git ready, Ampudia; we won't keep ye waitin' long."

"No!" cried Zebra Zack, showing himself from the bushes. "This time you do not escape me, the last of the defenders of the Alamo. I was there, black-hearted dog. I saw you spit in the face of brave old Dave Crockett, and trample on his face as he lay dead. Get ready, boys; and when we give the word, remember the Alamo!"

A wild yell told that the Texans heard him, and were ready. The yell was answered from the woods in the

rear, and they knew that their Lipan allies were on the alert.

"Give me a moment," cried Harry Bliss. "You know me, Ampudia, and that I am likely to keep my word. If you harm a hair of that sweet girl's head or of her brave old father's, we will not leave a man of you alive."

"I will kill her with my own hand, sooner than suffer you to retake her."

"Give the signal!" cried Harry.

Two rockets flashed up into the sky, the signal agreed upon with the Lipans. Then the clear voice of Harry Bliss rung through the chaparral.

"Charge!"

There came a rush of feet, and the tattered and smoke-begrimed rangers dashed out of the thicket, and charged across the open space toward the ruined city. Behind the walls crowded the braves of Durango, who poured in a dropping and irregular fire, which the rangers only noticed by ironical cheers, as they pressed on toward the walls. At the same moment the yells of the Lipans announced that they were coming up on the other side. Thirty men, under Harry Bliss, dashed for the main gate, which was guarded by nearly two hundred men, armed with escopetes, pistols, and sabers. They knew how to use the latter, and being in a trap, they fought well. Twice Harry and his men were forced to retreat from the gateway, with the loss of several of their number killed and wounded, for the men sent to the main gate were the best of the Durango troopers, many of them half-breed Indians, the bravest of their race. But, while they were exulting over the retreat of the attacking party, two detachments, one under Zebra Zack, and the other under Old Pap Bliss, had reached the summit of the wall, and had turned their rifles upon the strong force clustered about the gateway. They began to fall in heaps, and Ampudia saw that the day was lost, even before the fray had fairly commenced. The sound of a bugle was heard from the hillock upon which Zada had been left, and at the call the Mexicans rushed in from every side, and sought shelter in the ruins. The Texans came pouring in, and the Lipans were coming up on a run, when Ampudia shouted to them

to pause. The Texans halted, the Indians stood still, and cries of horror burst from the Texan ranks.

They saw Senor del Solida and Captain Marco standing upon the slope, with their hands bound, and their eyes covered; while six troopers, with muskets leveled, were standing before them. Not far away, with a pistol in one hand, and the other grasping the wrist of Zada del Solida, stood Ampudia. The pistol was cocked, but he still held it with the muzzle to the earth, while he addressed the Texans.

"I have the balance of power after all, gentlemen," he cried. "If you advance, these men will fire, and I myself will kill Zada with one barrel of this pistol, and myself with the other."

"You dare not!" gasped Harry Bliss.

"On you pizen skunk of misery!" hissed the alcalde. "I'll make it hot for you."

"Leave the place!" shouted Ampudia. "I am desperate now, and care not one rial what becomes of me. I give you five minutes to get your men outside the walls."

"And if we do not go?"

He raised the pistol, and placed the muzzle against the bosom of the brave girl whose hand he held. The Texans saw that he was in earnest, and while they retreated rapidly, Zebra Zack ran across to the Lipans, and ordered them back. Before five minutes were over, not a soul save the Mexicans, stood within the inclosure.

"What shall we do?" asked Harry, in dismay. "We cannot force the murder of those brave men, and my darling Zada."

"We are in arms for Texas," replied Zebra Zack, solemnly. "It is appointed that some must fall, and if these are chosen, why should we repine? For my part, I cannot believe that Ampudia, base as he is, would murder the girl."

"He would, I tell you," replied Harry. "He held the pistol against her bosom as he spoke to us."

At this moment Cocheto bounded out of the thicket, and stood before them.

"Why were the Lipans called back when the enemy were in sight?" he demanded angrily.

"You had eyes, Cocheto; you could see for yourself."

"What are three lives when great deeds are to be done? The Mexicans shall not rest another hour in the sacred city of my fathers. If the Texans will not come, Cocheto must do the work alone."

Harry Bliss started forward angrily, but Zebra Zack laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Let me speak to the chief." He stooped and whispered in the ear of Cocheto, who nodded approvingly.

"Long Beard is always wise," said Cocheto, lifting his head. "Speak to Captain Bliss, and we will go."

"Look you, Harry," said Zebra; "arrange your men in order for a rush, and at the first rifle-shot you hear inside the city, rush in with your men. Come, Cocheto; we will go to the Lipans."

And Zebra Zack, followed by Cocheto, strode away in the direction from which the Indian had come.

"You kin trust him," said the alcalde. "Ef Zebra Zack bez a plan, it is a good one."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATAL SHOT.

THEY waited, in anxious expectancy.

No sound was heard within the ruined city. Now and then a Texan crept to the top of the wall and looked over, coming back to report that the firing party still occupied the crest of the hill, and that Ampudia still held Zada.

"Stay there, Tom Placer," ordered Harry; "keep your eyes on them and report."

"I am watching," replied the man. "By George! There comes a priest up the hill."

"A priest?" cried Harry. "What do they want with a priest? Surely he does not mean to kill those brave men?"

"Kain't say," replied the man. "Blessed if I don't think

the old shaved head is going to marry Ampudia to the senora."

Harry Bliss bounded up the slope of the wall, and looked over. He saw that Ampudia still held Zada fast, while a black-robed priest had taken his station in front of them.

"You dog!" screamed Bliss, standing upright on the wall. "If you dare insult her, you shall die."

"Stand there and witness my marriage, Captain Bliss," retorted Ampudia, sneeringly. "Ha! Come no nearer, for I have the pistol still, and will use it if you dare to come within the walls."

"You shall answer for this, one day, Ampudia!" cried the half-frantic lover. "This is a mockery, for Zada del Solida will not marry you of her own free will."

"I must ask you to leave the wall, captain," Ampudia spoke quietly, raising his hand to a level with the heart of the girl. "Beware! Do not touch a weapon, or you doom her to death."

"Coward! However this may end, you will yet see the day when you will call on the rocks to cover you, for this wicked deed."

"Fool! I have set my life upon a cast, and I will stand the hazard. Go on, padre."

"I will have you flayed alive if you go on, priest; wait until I catch you."

"I will have him flayed now, if he does not go on, so you can perceive that I have the advantage of you still. Bah! don't be foolish, but yield to your disappointment as you may."

"Remember one thing, my daughter," cried Senor de Solida. "If you kill this man in defense of your honor, the good God will forgive you. As for me, he dare not let me live, for he knows that I would kill him like a wolf wherever I found him."

"And you, Captain Marco?" said Ampudia, with a sneer. "Have you no threats for me?"

"I have an offer to make, colonel. You know that I am the better swordsman of the two, but I will make it to your advantage to give me a meeting. Look you; I will have

one hand tied behind me, the right hand at that, and fight you the left hand against the right."

"Indeed! I will not fight you."

"Did I not tell you that he was a cowardly dog," said Marco, looking at Del Solida. "Why even that base wretch Mendoza drew the sword upon me, and would have fought me. But a coward is a coward, and can not change his nature, more than the leopard his spots."

"You want the fusilade!" screamed Ampudia. "Remove the bandages from their eyes, and let them witness my marriage."

The handkerchiefs were removed, and the two gallant men looked unflinchingly into the muzzles of the leveled weapons.

"Senors!" cried Harry, from the wall; "I can not give the word of command myself, but if you say charge, I will do it"

"At least you will take worthy vengeance, capitano mio!" cried Marco. "Hurrah for the Lone Star! Three times three for the great United States! Confusion to Mexico, and her vile rulers!"

"Another word, and I give the order to fire!" shrieked Ampudia.

"That is what he wants," said Mendoza. "Bid the priest go on, and you punish him more than if you planted a bullet in his heart."

"Oh, that I could get my hand upon you, my dear Carlos!" hissed Marco. "How it would delight me to close my fingers on your throat."

"Gag him if he speaks again," growled Ampudia. "Padre, go on."

The priest, one of those humble servants of the higher classes to be found in such countries as Spain and Mexico, at once commenced the service, and in spite of the protestations of the gal, went through the ceremony, and Zada del Solida was a wife, if such a ceremony could be called valid.

"You have done a cruel thing, Colonel Ampudia," she said with flashing eyes. "You have done a noble, a magnanimous deed. By force you have conquered me, but it is one thing to go through a mockery like this, and another to force me to acknowledge it."

"You may go, captain!" cried Ampudia. "I am about to order these men shot, and unless you wish to witness it, you may retire."

Harry leaped down from the wall, and Ampudia turned to the prisoners.

"You were right when you said that I would not permit you to live, seniors. You are about to die."

"Then we will die like Spanish gentlemen, proud that no mongrel blood flows through our veins," was Marco's retort.

"Make ready!" cried Ampudia. "Present arms; aim; f—"

His lips had almost shaped the word "fire," when a rifle cracked from the growth of mesquit which grew over the entrance to the secret passage. That rifle, aimed by a man who always did his work well, did not fail now. The word of command was frozen upon the lip of this wicked man, and a look of horror came over his face. The hand which held that of Zada dropped nerveless to his side, and he sunk down in a ghastly leap, the ragged hole in his temple showing where the deadly bullet had entered. Then came the charging cheer of the rangers, and up from the mesquit bushes leaped Zebra Zack and Cocheto, with their knives and hatchets ready. The firing party ran for the ruins, but Mendoza knew that there was no safety for him there, and he scrambled over the wall, and plunged into the chaparral.

"Let no man follow!" cried Zebra Zack. "I myself will hunt this wolf to his death."

He was gone, and Zada was in the arms of her lover, while the alcalde, after liberating the captain and Del Solida, performed a war-dance about them. The first transport over, they turned their attention to the Mexicans in the ruins. A white flag was hung out, and they surrendered without terms to the Texans. This had scarcely been done, when Zebra Zack came in slowly through the ruined gateway. He walked straight to the spot where Ampudia lay, and looked down upon his dead face. Then thrusting his hand into the bosom of the fallen man, he took out the "black list" which had been taken from him when first captured. Stooping, he dipped his finger in the flowing blood, and erased the name of Ampudia; and Harry, looking over his shoulder, saw him wipe out the name of Mendoza in the same way.

"Boys!" he cried. "Let me tell you who I am. My name was Zacharay Norton, and David Crockett was my uncle. I loved that man better than any creature upon earth, for he took me when a little child, without father or mother, and made a man of me. When he went to the Alamo, I went with him. Stricken down at his feet, I had sense enough left to know what was passing. I saw Crockett and Bowie fighting desperately, and many a Mexican fell before their knives. It was the company of Ampudia which assailed these two, and when they went down, covered with wounds, these six men, whose names are written here, trampled upon the face of that glorious man, and spat upon him. Lying under a heap of dead, I saw all this, and noted every man among them. I was one of the few who were passed over as dead, and I escaped. I went out under the clear Texan sky, and lifting my hands to heaven, I swore that those six men should die by my hand, and that I would not live in the dwellings of my people, or cut my hair or beard until the work was done."

"I do not blame you," said Captain Marco. "Not one of the men you killed but deserved a worse fate. Take my hand, brave man, and hear me swear that from this hour I renounce Mexico, and accept Texas as my home. And if Mexico should assail you, I will do all my poor arm can to drive back the invaders."

"Shake!" roared the alcalde. "I never thought that Old Pap Bliss c'u'd love a Greaser, but the time bez come. I'll bet you ar' the smartest little rooster in Mexico. I cotton to you, an' I'll lift the ha'r of any man who sez you ain't a bu'ster."

The prisoners were released on parole and returned to Mexico on foot, leaving their horses and arms as the prey of the Texans. From the time when himself and Cocheto passed through the secret abode of the war-god to the final rescue of Zada and the deadly aimed bullet of the prairie ranger pierced the brain of Ampudia, Zebra Zack has never sought the place. He may know that great wealth lies there, but a promise is a sacred thing to him, and through his means it will never be revealed. In the brief but glorious Mexican war, from Palo Alto to Monterey Harry Bliss, Del Solida,

Marco, the glorious old alcalde and Zebra Zack, rode side by side, and no man would have known that Mark Stanley, the lieutenant of rangers, was once Valdez Marco of the President's body-guard; or that the handsome, sunburned man who acted as ensign, was our old friend Zebra Zack. When the war was ended, they came back to enjoy the sweets of life upon the breezy Texan plains. Old Pap Bliss as boisterous as ever, but a fast friend of the sedate Senor del Solida. And Harry, Zack and Valdez Marco were never apart in the battle or the chase. The young men took up stock ranches near each other, and went three different ways, one to Tennessee, one to Mexico and the other to San Antonio; but when they returned each brought a partner with him. Need I say that Harry Bliss choose Zada del Solida, and that she made him a noble wife? And the black-eyed divinity whom Marco brought, and the auburn haired maid of Tennessee, learned to love each other dearly; and that love passed into another generation, for to this day the descendants of these three families are bosom friends. And none, to look at the calm, earnest face of Zack Norton would have dreamed that he could have been a pitiless avenger and an outcast on the plains.

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